Memories of Sandra Anderson A Cosmic Explorer

Book One
Eleven Fantasy Stories

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Eleven Fantasy Stories
(One – Eleven)

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Memories of Sandra Anderson
A Cosmic Explorer

A never ending exploration in the vast worlds of fantasy, as far as the most remote areas of the Cosmic Network; a magical journey into the abysses of the unconscious mind, a jumble of primordial symbols, subconscious desires, metaphysical quest.

Fateful choices, traversing the spiral vortex of time and space, lead the heroine and the reader beyond the insupportable earthly reality to unimaginable dreamlands or, even, nightmarelands. However, even the worse nightmare is more preferable than the world of everyday life...

Every adventure is a personal magic ritual. I cannot foresee the result of such rituals, but there must always be a result, for there are points of contact –synchronicities- between the material world and the astral planes.

More is yet to come...

Story One: Planet Doom

originally handwritten
from 31st July to 10th August, 1992

My name is Emma Lloyd. I am thirteen years old and I attend the second class of Gymnasium.

During the first break this morning, I was playing badminton with a girl who had just arrived from Australia. A little crowd of pupils was around us and I was feeling kinda proud of knowing how to play this unusual game. Then I noticed that handsome George Dim was not anywhere near.

I lifted my head and scanned the schoolyard with my eyes; there he was in the distance, laughing and chatting with another girl from our class. His indifference towards me made me feel rather bitter inside; being so abstracted, I hardly managed to hit the shuttlecock. A sense of emptiness overwhelmed me, a sun ray flooded my eye sight and...

* * * * *

Next moment the entire setting had changed. I was now admiring a fascinating, galactic landscape spreading before me. The craggy rocks sparkled in bluish colours; sparse, golden craters studded the azure plains; crystal cities were barely discernible amongst the craters in the distance; an eerie red sea extended beyond the plains to the horizon, making the environment even more outlandish. The night sky was magnificent, all covered by a unique galaxy rise.

I relished the breathtaking view from a big window, during a meeting with some friends. Strangely enough, the name of the planet was beyond my ken at that moment in time... and

I was no longer Emma. My body was different, more mature, strong and well-trained; my personality was also different, my memories were not those of Emma's – for her existence was receding fast in my conscience. I had a different name now, and it was *Sandra Anderson*.

First there were knocks on the door, then a terrible blow. Next moment the heavy, wooden door was thrust to pieces and a wild gang of villain motorists appeared at the threshold, all armed to the teeth. They were laughing and groaning with paranoid wickedness in their eyes. We all stood still, frozen of astonishment and fear. *Just what we needed right now*, I thought right after.

They trooped into the living room without hesitation, smashing down whatever they found in their way. They approached threateningly, asking us to give them all our money – but we all knew that was just a pretense; very soon we would all be dead. Unless...

There was a violent grasp around my waist; one of them had grabbed me and his ironic smile meant nothing good. His arms were strong and muscular, and I felt as if the air were driven out of my lungs.

“This sweetie here will die last”, he chuckled, putting a hand around my neck. “If she is good enough, of course”, he added, and the rest of them burst into mad laughter, while my friends were still frozen of terror. “Let me tell you chickens, either you give us the money or not, you are going to die, for we are...”

The vicious man holding me, apparently their chief, paused before completing his sentence. I had not managed to suppress my laughter successfully...

“What's the matter with her?” he wondered and I felt his grasp loosening a little.

“Don't shout like this; you just make me laugh”, I answered calm, breaking every pretense.

Next moment the intruders were extremely outraged, so I had to act instantly and instinctively; I hit the chief with my elbow and one of his men with a flying kick. I jumped high into the air, avoiding the blazing guns of the rest, right before landing on their faces. They were just too slow for me. Within moments they were all knocked out, save one: their chief, who was just making his way out through the thrashed door.

My friends had seized the guns of his companions, so they no longer needed my help. I rushed out immediately and ran to the underground garage, where I had parked my motorbike; it was certainly inferior to the villain’s, smaller and probably slower, but I had to reach and arrest him no matter what...

* * * * *

I rode miles and miles on my motorbike among the serene, turquoise dunes, trying to keep up with him, until I realized -not without a certain anxiety- that I had lost him. I slowed down, stopped, got off the vehicle and looked carefully all around. There was no sign of the rider, nothing but desert dunes and shallow craters, and the crystal cities seemed to be further than ever before. Obviously, I had ridden too far; I was now completely alone in the middle of an alien wilderness, and I had a very bad feeling about this.

Everything seemed to be happening weirdly fast today; all of a sudden, someone pounced on me from behind, without making the slightest sound. *Where was he hiding?* I only wondered and then we were both down on the sand fighting. At that moment I realized I had no idea who that man was, what he wanted from me or how he had managed to find me on this isolated planet...

My opponent proved to be quite flexible, avoiding my blows with considerable ease. As he stood before me, parrying another direct attack of mine, I saw he was very young, with a well-trained body and a tight fitting uniform. He didn't look much like the wild villain who had invaded my friends' house some minutes ago. Just then it occurred to me he was a warrior of Venor, my archenemy.

Parenthesis

Venor, son of Assar the Great, is the heir to the throne of the Interstellar Yrkanian Empire. Having conquered lots of civilizations in lots of galaxies, the Yrkanian Fleet attacked my home planet as well. I happened to be one of the few survivors taken prisoners of war, destined to become servants of the Empire. However, I soon managed to escape thanks to my innate psychic powers, till then unsuspected by the enemies. I have been fighting the Yrkanian tyranny ever since, all over the known universe...

End of Parenthesis

Therefore, that warrior had been assigned to follow me on this planet and arrest or kill me. At the moment he was standing a few meters away, threatening me with a magnetic boomerang in hand. In a split second he launched it against me and I barely managed to destroy it with my laser gun. He looked at me with in proud despair, as I was aiming at his fine body – and he looked so oddly attractive...

Next moment, he jumped high in the air and performed an impressive somersault, with the intention of attacking me again. I hardly had the time to reduce the power of my laser gun before firing. He collapsed on the ground, right before me, unconscious. I approached with slow steps, touched his right shoulder hesitantly and felt the electrifying quivers; there was nothing else I could do at the time but...

I carried him into the nearest crater, laid him down on the golden sand and observed his slender body like mesmerized. Unwittingly my hand was on his broad chest, then on his neck. I felt the muscles under the thin, metalized fabric for a few moments, and I could no longer resist; I laid over him and kissed his lips. He came to himself with a start, only to stay motionless for some seconds of astonishment. His efforts to push me aside proved to be rather weak; in fact, he was more than eager to make my erotic fantasies come true as a prisoner of war, and I enjoyed his body to the fullest until he was exhausted.

In the meanwhile, I sought to interrogate him so as to find out what he had actually wanted from me in the first place, but my endeavors brought no result. I only found out his name was Jason and I was surprised to realize he looked a lot like a comic hero of my youth; beyond that, the young man appeared to be oddly innocent, without any hidden purposes whatsoever. So much the better for him...

I had just let him go, not without certain bitterness, when I suddenly overheard a familiar voice coming from his bracelet transmitter. Strangely enough, Mark didn't seem to mind I could hear: "Everything is ready; the planet has been mined and there will be no more opposition; you've done an excellent job, keeping her busy long enough; but time is running out, so get out of there now!"

I shuddered as I recognized Venor's voice. It was crystal clear to me now that this was all a set-up right from the start. *How could I be so foolish?* I wondered, angry with myself. At that point Mark turned and faced me with sinister eyes. He gave me a weird, crooked smile and... that was it: he began to transmute, finally obtaining a form I knew terribly well.

Both of us were elsewhere suddenly – inside a dark chamber

that had just been materialized around us, out of nowhere. Behind three brightly-lit red candles, I could discern the demon's platinum hair and green eyes, a non-human expression on his wild face. He was dressed in black garments that seemed to be made of thick darkness. I stepped back in horror, as I recognized the arch-demon widely known as Asmodeus, ruler of the Dark Side and ancestral protector of the Yrkanian Empire.

He opened his mouth to utter one of his dreadful magic spells and I shut my eyes in despair, knowing there was no escape from such evil in the material world.

I am not at all sure about how I managed to escape. Falling in trance, I sought to transfer my consciousness through space and time instantly – something I have achieved only a few times so far.

I made it; I abandoned the doomed planet with the echo of a demonic chuckle in my ears, but I knew it was not over yet. I needed urgent help -the help of whom I had just cheated on- and I only hoped I had not made any mistakes in transferring my conscience to a very specific, most desired place...

* * * * *

The landscape surrounding me was magnificent: there were steep rocks around a crystal pagoda on my right, in front of a turquoise waterfall; its shallow river winded through the dark brown stone masses, the water sparkling at the sun rays like diamonds. The serene, emerald sea on my left reflected a huge sun rising over purple volcanoes in the horizon, under a fiery sky. Flocks of white birds were flying away. Thick branches of almond trees in blossom crowned the unique panorama. I sighed in relief, as I was sure I was at the right place, for there was no land in the whole universe as magical and real as the legendary *Eldyla.*

He was there too, my one and only *Peter of the Stars*, king and ruler of this semi-material planet, unbelievably attractive as always. He looked so innocent and unpredictable, dynamic and restless, casually sitting on a cliff, gazing at the wondrous sunrise as if in reverie. I accosted him slowly, making sure not to make the slightest noise, intending to surprise him. The chances of my achieving that were close to none, yet we always enjoyed that little game, and he always pretended to be taken aback by my sudden appearance.

I hugged him from behind and he turned round supposedly astonished; he responded promptly to my warm kisses and we loved each other wildly right on that flat rock facing the sunrise. Since Eldyla is a place beyond any other space and time, I didn't mind at all about the precious time spent in heavenly love...

When that bliss came to an end, I told him everything about the doomed planet, Asmodeus' threat against me and Venor's involvement, explaining I could not face such dangers all by myself. He looked at me askance and replied nothing, but I knew well what his silence meant.

* * * * *

Then I was back in that dark room again, but it was completely empty now, cold and murky; thank Goddess, Asmodeus was not there – yet, I knew I was not alone.

“No time this time, Sandra!”

I turned around instantly and faced my fatal enemy, the throne prince Venor of Yrkania. He was standing there haughty, his laser firearm aiming at me. A silver beam flashed and I hardly avoided it by ducking just in time. I rolled on the floor and attacked him immediately, grabbing his legs and making him lose balance; the gun fell into the

electro-digital fireplace and exploded in a soft, white light.

We fought really hard down on the floor, among the shattered furniture. It was not long before I was under him, his strong hands holding mine wide open over my head. I tried to break free but this proved to be impossible, as I felt strained and overwhelmed. My resistance got weaker and weaker until I could no longer move; then there was a terrible blow on my head and nothing else.

As soon as I came to myself again, I noticed two lines of red, flickering lights on the ceiling, which allowed me to see that my cell was made of metal walls; it was hot and steamy, most probably a furnace. The temperature was rising moment by moment and, just as I was about to panic in the prospect of my imminent, horrible death, suddenly the power was cut off. I couldn't help laughing aloud, full of unspeakable relief, as the heavy portal sprang open and I saw: Peter of the Stars was standing there; he had already undermined all electronic systems, escaped all soldier blocks, found the place of my execution, opened the metal portal and pulled me out. Just his kind of action...

“I just can't thank you enough”, I said and hugged him; yet he seemed somewhat indifferent to my affection.

I stayed speechless, listening to the ominous silence for a few seconds. Then, through the window pane apposite us, I witnessed something like lightning in the horizon and I knew it was already too late. The chain of nuclear reactions had already started; soon, this beautiful planet would be nothing but a memory. Just like innumerable times before, a whole planet would be used as a sacrifice and an altar at the same time, an offer to the sinister entities which have been protecting the Yrkanian Empire for thousands of years.

We ran as fast as we could to find an exit, but no sooner had we finally found it, than it proved to be a dead end. The very

next moment we heard a sinister laugh echo behind us; we both turned round simultaneously and faced the arch-demon Asmodeus in his pitch black garment hovering in the air, his long white hair shimmering like silky waves of light. Within a split second the apparition was gone, but I wasn't relieved at all.

An instant later I noticed an impressive fresco that covered a large part of the outside wall: It showed Prince Philip, one of Venor's ancestors. He had short brown hair, a nice smile on his young face; he was wearing an attractive outfit in shades of orange and brown, as well as a red mantle. He was holding a shiny sword in his right hand, a green shield in the left one. He looked quite majestic as he was running away from a lofty tower on top of a steep path; grass and laurels grew under his purple boots. Then my strange reverie was broken and I noticed Peter had just pulled out his laser sword -but it was too late…

Venor had already reached us and had shot down Peter, who was now lying down with his right thigh bleeding. "That was it... you won, Venor", I heard Peter utter breathless, as the enemy was about to give him the final blow.

Defying the enemy and his heavy firearm, I rolled on the ground fast, grasped a big stone and hurled it against Venor without thinking at all; as if in slow motion, I watched the stone performing a parabolic truck towards the enemy's head, while he was gaping of bewilderment.

* * * * *

Then everything began to blur and change; the whole world seemed to be melting before my eyes and, after a moment of vertigo I, Emma Lloyd, managed to strike back the shuttlecock.

The game of badminton went on for some more minutes. A

group of schoolmates were still watching, while George Dim was still wandering around the schoolyard smiling and talking to everybody but me, while I was trying to put my mind together again.

All the above narrated space adventure had taken place within a second of ordinary earth time.

To experience worlds inside the world is the definition of madness; but I can control this madness...

Story Two: Mind Games

originally handwritten
from 17th to 24th August, 1992

I can still recall very clearly my first contact with George Dim in the astral planes. Let me tell you how it happened.

The day was dawning and I, Emma, had hardly woken up when I saw him standing next to my bed. I looked at him for a few moments of pleasant bewilderment; I just couldn't believe my eyes, and he was so irresistible. "I want to give you a kiss", he told me in a low voice. "A real kiss".

He smiled softly, got in bed beside me and that was it – a soft kiss that felt like electricity. I caressed his neck, then his shoulders, his arms, his chest, his waist; every touch felt smooth as velvet, yet so strong...

Without even my thinking about it, I kissed him all over his body, feeling the vibration of pure *élan* in every spot of his fair skin. His brown hair shimmered in the first light of day, his hazel eyes were sparkling straight into my heart. I tasted his love like intoxicated, while his face was radiating with an odd, innocent lust.

Within the vertigo of our unworldly love, the walls of my bedroom began to melt away; the furniture started to change gradually, until my room gave its place to a long, empty corridor. Emma was already sinking to oblivion; Sandra Anderson was about to emerge...

* * * * *

It was a new mission for me, a challenge in a faraway part

of the known universe, on an insignificant planet called Earth; I had been informed about a “haunted corridor” in an underground military base. People vanished there, and I had been hired to solve the mystery.

Well, the case was clear to me right from the start; I only wondered why all those people had failed to see it. There was a black metal chair stuck on the floor of that corridor and nobody could tell me how long ago or why it had been left there. The item looked kinda strange, as there was a round hole at the centre of the seat; its back was made of a single, vertical, iron bar.

There were cameras all along that corridor and I had to spend hours in a special surveillance room, watching people (most of them workers in the base) going up and down that corridor. Occasionally someone sat on that chair; after a while, a kind of helmet sprouted from the vertical bar and came down on the person's head, making them torpid for some seconds. Then, all at once, the person was actually pulped and absorbed inside the hole on the seat.

My first thought was to destroy the chair, but then I changed my mind, because I knew that was not just an object; I had no doubt it was an alien life form. Yet, I had no idea what it was exactly and I preferred to avoid any possible consequences of its immediate destruction. I just explained my point of view to those in change and made sure nobody would cross that corridor ever again.

The black “chair” is still standing solitary in the abandoned, dark corridor. *When will anyone come and keep me some company? I feel so lonely... but maybe one day I will meet someone who's like me*, it ponders gloomily every now and then.

They didn't seem to be very satisfied with my job, so I left Earth disappointed, having decided not to accept any job of

that kind again. All I wanted now was an extreme adventure, a kind of experience that could give me real satisfaction…

* * * * *

There was only one thing in the whole universe that could whip up my interest at that time. It was a kind of ancestral legend, there was only one way I might be able to reach it and it could prove to be fatal. Anyway, I had to find Peter of the Stars first, for I needed his help for that.

I found him fighting the notorious space vagabond Kochon on the villain's spacecraft, which had just landed on the mossy cliffs of Eldyla, Goddess knows for what sinister purpose. Peter had stepped on a bulky, external canon, and he was trying to fight back when the enemy managed to disarm him with a fast blow. Peter's laser gun slipped off his hand and fell into the sea below.

“You are unarmed now, Peter, and I still have my weapon!” Kochon groaned.

“I can see that!” Peter snapped coolly.

Next moment the vagabond aimed his laser weapon at his opponent's chest; Peter reacted just in time and overwhelmed the enemy with a sharp flying kick, finally disarming him.

“What... what was that?” Kochon uttered in surprise.

Peter's answer was another high kick on the vagabond's chin, which made him fall back, quite a few meters away. But, enough of that game...

I made my appearance right at that moment, on the highest cliff nearby, and cast the vagabond my sternest look.

“Kochon, I suggest you get in your spacecraft and leave Eldyla at once!” I told him in a firm voice.

Without saying anything, the Lord Kochon stood up, made a

wry face and walked away. It's just as well that it had all ended so easily…

Later on I explained my plan to Peter in detail. At first he was skeptical, but finally he saw it as a worthy challenge and agreed to help me.

* * * * *

I had thought of that plan over and over again, and seemed to be fine. However, now that I was standing at the edge of the precipice, while those menacing Yrkanian soldiers were approaching, I felt scared as never before and not at all sure about my plan. But it was too late for regrets...

As I saw them coming up the steep rocks towards me, I clasped my laser gun even more firmly. Within moments they had surrounded me and there was nothing for me to do, as I had reached a dead end.

“Drop it, Sandra, or you're dead!” one of them cried.

I obeyed reluctantly, while my heart was beating like a drum. But... *What dies when you die?* I asked myself, only to dismiss the thought at once.

Prince Venor could not believe his eyes when he saw me in his starship, taken as a prisoner by eight of his warriors.

“She was watching our starship from the rocks, at the highest top of the precipice” one of them explained.

“Put her in a cell”, ordered Venor in a flat voice. “I shall take special care of her later”.

Nevertheless, that "later" proved to last a lot more than expected. Days and days passed weary in that cell, and I tried really hard to contain my anxiety. There was no doubt the prince was watching every movement of mine through hidden cameras. I was feeling quite vulnerable at that time, as I was literally at Venor's mercy, and I knew he was

contriving one of his “special” punishments for me. I just hoped he wouldn't decide to impose it on me before the starship had reached its next stop. Hopefully, Peter would be there and make his appearance at the correct moment.

My cell was kinda strange: It was painted in shades of orange; there was a thin, multicolored mattress on my bed and a sizable painting on the adjacent wall. It showed an open window that revealed a purple, moon-lit sky over sloping rooftops. I can't say why it had been placed there, but the picture reminded me of simple pleasures long forgotten and its dark beauty fascinated me more than it should.

At least I had plenty of time to exercise there – I mean exercise on meditation techniques. More often than not, I knelt on the mattress, shut my eyes and emptied my mind, enjoying the ecstatic experience of inner void under the fake moonlight of the painting.

“What the devil is she doing now?” one of my two jailers wondered at a moment, as he looked at me through the transparent door.

“She is meditating... Bullshit!” replied the other one with a contemptuous smile.

“I don't get it! What is the prince waiting for, to undo her once and for all?”

“I've heard he has special plans for her, as soon as we reach Ed Tyrr; if it is what I suspect, I already feel sorry for her!”

“She ain't ugly, you know”, said the first one, a cunning expression on his face.

Although I was still meditating, I could feel their eyes all over me; they wouldn't try anything of course, for they wouldn't dare bring about Venor's disapproval.

Next moment I opened my eyes and stared at them, fully concentrated. Both jailers stood still, like mesmerized, watching a white, thin chord coming out from my solar plexus. It crossed the cell quickly and got through the shut door, forming a soft, hazy kind of cloud right between them. They didn't even manage to stumble back as they kept on observing the eerie cloud changing forms, until it took the shape of a huge serpent. Its dreadful mouth with the long, sharp teeth was wide open, its green eyes were sparkling at their faces.

Next instant their stupor was gone and they both fled in terror, leaving me alone for a few minutes. The apparition gradually melted away and I absorbed the hazy chord back into my solar plexus. That caused me some agitation inside, only for a few moments; then I felt calm, really calm. Venor had probably watched the incident through his hidden cameras, I didn't mind though; I had just had some fun, which would soon bring me a good night sleep...

* * * * *

When we landed on planet Ed Tyrr, I was put in manacles; Venor himself, as well as two of his men, took me to a dark precipice nearby. As we were walking on the rugged ground over the Ed Tyrr Abyss, I was no longer wondering what his intentions for me were. Suddenly my self-confidence was gone and I regretted my extremely ambitious plan. I had never expected him to think of anything like that, but apparently I was wrong.

“The Dwellers of the Abyss will be very happy to have a beautiful woman like you, Sandra, in their hands”, said Venor, his heavy laser weapon in hand. “They will love you to death!” he hissed and I chilled at the thought of what the men of the Abyss did to captured women. Right then I became very anxious, wondering where the heck Peter

was...

A strange, bright light hovered in the distance for a second or two, attracting our attention. Then, all of a sudden, as we were passing by a high, prismatic rock, someone pounced on my captors from behind. It was Peter, who had been hiding behind that rock. With two high kicks of his the two soldiers were immediately put out of action. However, the prince reacted instinctively with a swift blow of his elbow on Peter's left temple, leaving him unconscious on the ground.

“What is he doing here, Sandra?” roared Venor and raised his laser gun ominously. “You two had planned this right from the start, hadn’t you?” he added grimly.

“Thanks for the ride, Venor” I replied, as calm as possible, hoping to distract him.

“Thanks…?”

“I had to reach Ed Tyrr somehow and I needed a good spaceship for that”, I admitted.

“Why... You bitch! Tell me why!” cried Venor and pulled out a second laser gun with his left hand, both barrels aiming at me now. For the moment, Peter was safe.

“It was my plan to be captured by your men and travel in your starship, even as a prisoner! Did you really think you had the best of me, you creep?” I burst in false triumph that concealed my despair.

Venor pulled both triggers immediately; I ducked to the ground just in time. I rolled fast, seeking to take cover behind the nearby rocks; yet, there was no laser beam from the gun. I just noticed a sort of golden dust around his weapons.

“What the hell!” swore Venor in bewilderment.

All he saw then, was an extremely quick moving light that stroke him on the chin with incredible strength. Venor cried of pain and lost balance for a second; that was all the time I needed to pounce on him and take him down. One of his guns tumbled down the rocky precipice; the other one was in my hands.

Next moment Venor was lying on the ground unarmed, while I was aiming at him with his own weapon, Peter already standing near me.

“What was that?” the enemy wondered, watching the golden dust hovering away from him, gradually forming a bright light again.

“Artificial intelligence nanoparticles”, explained Peter smiling. “I don't like resorting to such means of action, but in certain cases I prefer to”.

“Come on Sandra”, Venor's voice sounded passive. “Take your revenge now”.

For a moment I was tempted to do so; right then, a loud buzzing noise filled the air.

“The Dwellers of the Abyss!” exclaimed Venor. “They are coming!”

“They will take good care of you, as soon as they realize there is no woman for them and you've tricked them”, I said complacently.

“But... but...” the prince stammered, as the bright light formed a golden, sparkling cloud again. This time it was bigger than before, quickly surrounding Peter and me. We were both lifted into the air and flew away fast, away from that dangerous place.

* * * * *

I felt relieved only when we finally arrived at out final

destination, far away from the Abyss. It was a small, picturesque lake surrounded by green reeds, situated by the foot of a mountain that rose wonderfully purple under the setting sun; a few swans were floating on the calm water. An old windmill was discerned in the distance.

We landed on the rugged land by the stony lake shore. After a brief, hopeless search around, the cloud of nanoparticles hovered before us for a few seconds and it began taking a specific form again. This time it was a kind of hologram, showing a beautiful, young girl. She looked quite charming, as if she had just escaped from some fairy tale; she was wearing a fine blue dress with a white apron and a blue ribbon on her long, blond hair. She raised her right hand slowly and pointed at a specific spot among the rocks of the mountain. It took us a few seconds to realize it was the entrance of a cavern, which was somehow impossible to make out amongst the shadows of the steep slope.

After the hologram had melted away into the air, we climbed on the rocky mountain slope so as to reach and enter the cavern. Soon we had to follow a narrow path that went lower and lower underground, until we reached a spacious cavity.

The natural environment was really fascinating, full of odd-shaped rocks and water streams gargling softly. The cave walls were studded by odd, polygonal gems that produced a weak, hazy light. The landscape was gorgeous, but we had not arrived there only to admire it.

Right in the middle of the cavity stood an ancient altar made of concrete, black stone. A big, shiny sphere was resting on it; it was the magic sphere of Moragg, untouched and unused for thousands of years. It looked like a giant pearl, placed in an open shell of proportional size. The sphere was said to be an accumulator of supernatural powers, and it

once belonged to a renowned, ancient witch named Moragg. Although it was mostly considered to be a myth, I wondered how it had stayed intact during all those centuries, away from the hands of the greedy. I approached impatiently and laid my hands on it, while Peter was standing behind.

First there was a violent shock; then I felt as if I were sinking in endless void. I am not at all sure when the darkness gave its place to a bright light, but it soon became so insupportable that I let my hands go and knelt down breathless.

All knowledge of the universe had been mine – only for a second. Right after, all that wisdom returned to oblivion, even faster than it had entered my mind. This is how I learned that such wisdom is not destined for any human being, because no human being is pure enough for it.

Yet, not everything was lost; there was something left for me, an unexpected gift: an extraordinary sense of *power* was filling every part of my body and soul – the *power* to manipulate ether and matter with my free will. It was a unique, unprecedented spiritual experience. While it lasted, no more than a few seconds, I was certain I could perform miracles: move objects with my mind; teleport myself wherever I wished; materialize or dematerialize things.

I was tempted to try something right away – but all at once I was *without*. I can't find a better way to express this but I was *without*. All the power was gone. *Shall I ever experience it again?* I wondered, falling into the deepest sorrow. At that moment, Peter approached and put his arms around my shoulders – in a tender effort to ease my pain.

At least, the landscape was still magnificent. Peter and I sat on a rock for some moments and relished the natural beauty of the cave. A smooth, emerald-colored pool was under our feet; lofty, weird-shaped rocks jutted out of the ground

forming impressive simulacras, as if another world was about to come to life any minute…

* * * * *

It all happened in a split second: In the absolute stillness of the cavern, a faint noise was enough to attract our attention and spoil all the magic. “Sandra!” I heard Peter shout, but before I had the time to turn round and see what was wrong, an Yrkanian warrior had just appeared out of the blue, already pressing the trigger of his weapon. Peter moved fast and sought to protect me with his body. Next moment he fell on the shallow water below, struck down by the soldier's laser beam. At the same time the enemy was neutralized by the rushing cloud of nanoparticles -but it was too late.

“Peter!” I rushed down the rocks and bent over him, in sheer desperation. I tried to feel the pulse on his neck but it was in vain. I lifted his body in my arms and saw a huge wound on his chest. Tears came down my cheeks and I wished and wished this were nothing but a bad dream…

A bad dream...

At that moment, the bright cloud of nanoparticles approached fast and formed a massive, sparkling light that covered his wound. I smiled relieved, for I was now certain that was not the end of him and our love.

“Another place, Peter, another time, we shall meet again...” a voice inside me recited – but my heart lost a leap as I figured out it not my inner voice.

Then I woke up, and I was Emma again, all alone in the dusk of dawn…

Story Three: Dead End

originally handwritten
from 25th to 31st August, 1992

My playing football with schoolmates soon proved to be a bad idea. I, Emma, had never played that game at school before and I got too timorous whenever someone tried to tackle me. Nevertheless, I did change the course of the ball once, taking it from a tall boy who was running towards our goalpost. After that unhoped-for success of mine, my team expected an impressive performance from me – but that was it: I barely managed to kick the ball again. "Is Lloyd with us?" asked a player of my team at a moment, and everybody laughed. *What the heck am I doing here?* I wondered after a while, acknowledging my inability to play equally well with the others. I walked out of the football pitch with slow steps. Nobody noticed.

There was a pleasant surprise for me when I arrived home that afternoon. Jay, a cousin of mine, had just arrived from England for vacations. He is 37, a genetic scientist and a university professor since he was 25. He also happens to be a very handsome, sportive, modern-looking guy. I had not met him for ten years but I have always had feelings of liking and admiration for him. However, I doubt whether these feelings have ever been mutual...

In the evening we went to a nearby cafeteria together. It soon got clear he was rather disappointed at me – especially once he realized I don't have much success in men, as I am not like those gorgeous females he usually dates. He got less

and less interested in me, until all we had was just a typical, boring conversation. I could sense he was actually contemptuous towards me and I felt as if I were going to burst.

“What do you know about dreams, Jay?” I asked abruptly.

“Dreams?” he said casually. “Oh, they are a product of our subconscious, Emma. The mind balances itself during sleep and dreams...”

“What else, Jay?” I asked impatiently.

“What else, Emma?”

“Dreams are doors, Jay. Doors to other worlds!” I went on full of enthusiasm, hoping to impress him. “Even the future can be affected by dreams! If you can control your dreams, you can affect the future! You may also travel through dimensions, live experiences on the Other Side!”

“Where did you read that stuff, Emma?” he frowned at once. “Some silly magazine? For heaven's sake, try to find a boyfriend instead!” he chuckled.

That was it! I could no longer stand that attitude! It was time Mr Know-it-all got a lesson!

“Tonight, Jay, we shall share a dream; and you will see what I am talking about” I announced firm.

He said nothing; he only looked away, probably thinking I was crazy.

* * * * *

This time I, Sandra Anderson, had been hired as a paid killer. Exterminating creeps for payment is certainly a dirty job, but somebody has to do it. Nevertheless, shooting a person -even a creep- in cold blood, without giving them the chance of defending themselves, offers only a feeble satisfaction, barely comparable with the excitement of a fair

fight. I don't like taking jobs like that, but the money was very good and the villain I wiped out had to be taken out of the way, because he had destroyed thousands of human lives metaphorically and literally.

Another thing which made me feel quite uneasy during that mission, was the fact I had to work close to Venor's capital – which could prove to be too dangerous. For this reason, I intended to leave the planet and the solar system right after getting my payment.

I was about to embark on my hired spacecraft when a familiar voice interrupted my thoughts.

“Where do you think you are going, Sandra?”

“Away from here”, I replied without turning my head.

“Turn round and face me”, said Venor in a commanding voice.

“Are you alone?” I wanted to know.

“Yes!”

I obeyed only to find out he was standing a few metres away, all alone and unarmed. He was dressed in a tight, dark green uniform with metal epaulets and black boots. Apparently, my fatal enemy was getting bolder and bolder, which made me wonder...

Next moment he raised his right hand and attacked me with a powerful blast of energy, which I hardly avoided by stepping aside just in time. Obviously, Venor had improved his mental powers considerably since the last time we had met, and he felt so sure of himself that he didn't hesitate to use them directly against me.

I retaliated immediately by jumping high in the air and counterattacking with a violent surge of energy from both my palms. I expected that to daunt him, but no; he defended

himself successfully crossing his wrists over his head, extinguishing my energy beams completely.

Next moment he launched numerous rays of astral energy against me; I barely dodged them, springing and rolling in the air, then down on the ground. However, I couldn't find the chance to fight back, and I was already out of breath when I had to block a terrible energy blast, crossing my arms in front of my chest; this shocked me really bad and weakened me a lot.

My head was spinning when I realized I was now face to face with a monstrous dragon, while Venor was smiling behind it. It was an ethereal apparition of course, created on the spot by the enemy's mental powers. It was not a real beast, but it could be very dangerous just as well. I strove not to panic, keeping in mind it was only a thought-form, a sort of ethereal hologram made by Venor's imagination; *and what is created by imagination, can also be destroyed by imagination...*

The huge monster moved towards me and I stumbled back, focusing all my attention on it. I envisioned it bursting into a thousand pieces, perishing in bright flames and being reduced to ashes. However the creature resisted, giving me the impression it was getting more and more material moment by moment. Then it occurred to me that it was not a thought-form but an artificial ghost – which meant great difficulty.

Next instant, the dragon soared high in the air and swooped down at once, hurling against me a thick beam of scorching flames, while I could feel the *power* abandoning me. I brought my arms in front of my face instinctively, in a desperate effort to protect myself, yet it was impossible for me to avoid that terrible psychic attack. Although ethereal, those flames burnt like hell; I screamed of terror and this is

where that fight ended...

* * * * *

Where am I? Who am I?

Frankly, I am not at all sure.

I live in a small cottage in the middle of an endless, wild forest. The natural environment is wonderful, but my life here is nothing but agony. It's been some days now that my mind is blank because of a careless bump on my head, when I fell down the stairs of the veranda. At least this is what Venor, my husband, tells me. My name is Sandra, he says, and I am his wife.

I cannot remember how we lived before my accident, but I think our relationship is -I dare say- extreme. He is more of a master than a husband. He demands that I work hard all day, doing all kinds of household chores, and he is very hard to please. He even hits me when something is not as perfect as it should be.

We are isolated here. I don't see any other people around, nobody ever visits us, and there are no neighbours. Sometimes I even wonder if there is any human life beyond that forest, but for some mysterious reason I never try to wander far from the house.

The first physical contact I had with my husband -after the accident- was more or less traumatic. I felt too embarrassed, almost scared, as if he were some stranger; I had covered my body with the sheet, holding it tight under my chin, but he grabbed it and threw it out of the bed; then he was over me, tore my underwear to pieces, penetrated me at once and stayed inside me all night long.

He is a violent lover; he often gets very aggressive making me burst to tears of desperation -and lust. Other times, when I least expect it, he gets tender; it's a kind of game he likes

to play in bed and I know he enjoys it to the fullest. Maybe he loves me, in some strange way...

During one of my brief walks in the forest the other day, I met a girl who was gathering wild berries in a small basket. I was astounded to see her, because it was the first time I had ever met anyone there. At first, I hesitated to approach; she smiled to me in a friendly way, and introduced herself as Rose. Her hair was long and blond, decorated with a black ribbon; she was wearing a long, light blue dress with a tight black bust over it; a nice red shawl was around her shoulders. She lifted her head and gazed at me with her bright, blue eyes; she looked soft and kind, an air of old-time fairy-tales around her, as if she were not of this cruel world.

“What the fuck are you doing here?” she asked me in a soft voice, which made her rudeness sound even more enigmatic.

For a moment I stood numb; then, a torrent of hitherto lost memories rushed into my mind, making me feel dizzy. I could remember again – Sandra Anderson... assassination... a fight of power with Venor of Yrkania... the ghost dragon... the house in the forest... Oh, my Goddess!

“Life is bloody boring in the forest”, she went on, in the same, oddly soft voice. “I suggest you get out of here now!”

I turned round automatically and fled without looking back. Very soon I was back in the big city, where I made sure to hide myself in a place Venor could never find out. Or so I thought...

* * * * *

That evening I returned to my hiding place – an abandoned warehouse in the western part of the city's underground network. I felt quite optimistic because I had just changed

identity and arranged to leave the planet on a spacecraft of public transport early next morning.

However, my good mood was gone as soon as I opened the front door and saw something that had certainly not been there before: There was a gigantic poster on the opposite wall, showing an actress who was once -and still is- worldwide famous for her seductive beauty. A sex symbol, they said. She had short, blond hair and a wide smile on her sensual face; her flimsy, white dress seemed to be flapping in air waves.

Before I had the time to wonder what that picture was doing in my place, I saw long, ugly shadows of men emerging behind big wooden boxes. They appeared one by one, all aiming their weapons at me, groaning and chuckling as they came nearer and nearer with cautious steps and mad faces. I pulled out my laser gun and stepped back in despair, as I realized why they weren't complete strangers to me: The gang consisted of eight notorious convicts -the most dangerous on the planet- supposed to be in prison now. Yet, somehow they were out and I could imagine how and why: they had been hired by Venor and promised freedom, after their accomplishing a certain mission: to find and kill me.

“You see guys? This is the infamous Sandra Anderson! It was not so hard to find her!” announced one of them in a vulgar voice. I assumed he were their chief.

“We have orders; the bitch must die and her corpse brought to Venor”, another one said, verifying my suspicions.

“Of course, but we shall have some fun first”, said a third one, and they all laughed in complacence.

“Drop your gun, Sandra! This is going to save you a few hours of life!” cried the "chief".

I obeyed at once in a pretense of compliance. I don't always

feel the *power* – it comes and goes in waves. Yet, right now I was feeling so wonderfully powerful...

“So, you want fun?” I exclaimed next moment, leaving everybody flabbergasted. “I'm going to give you some fun you will never forget!”

Then I hushed and none of them dared utter a word; a kind of cold drought swept through the old warehouse and the lights got dimmer. The metal front door slammed shut, one or two weapons were about to fire against me but they didn't. None of the villains was able to resist when I put them out of action with a single magic spell of mine. They even seemed to be relieved when I called the police and fled right away, leaving them locked inside.

* * * * *

I returned to the wild forest with a sole quest: to settle with Venor. I found him not far from our “home”, at the rocky glade we considered our “back yard”, as if he were waiting for me.

“I have been waiting for you, Sandra”, he admitted flatly.

He looked really attractive in his blue, tight-fitting uniform with the black belt and the high boots. His long, blond hair waved shiny in the gusts of wind. In his right hand there was an odd-shaped weapon with a very wide barrel.

Next moment he fired at me, again and again; I barely dodged the thick, white beams, stepping aside just in time. He kept on firing and I kept on avoiding his beams with successive sets of acrobatic jumps until, after an impressive somersault among the nearby rocks, I stood right behind him, feeling incredibly angry.

He sought to turn round and attack me again, but I didn't give him the time to do so; I swept the weapon off his hands with a fast kick. A second side kick made him lose balance

and fall back. Right after, I pounced on him and punched him in the face so hard that he lost his senses.

When he recovered, a few moments later, he sat up in pain and leaned against a bulky rock. He looked at me in wonder and despair, as I was now aiming his own weapon against him. He seemed to be overwhelmed, yet he also gave me the impression of being strangely calm.

“You want my blood, Sandra, but not like this…” he uttered in a low voice.

Suddenly the weapon seemed to weigh a thousand pounds in my hands; I was still aiming at him but a part of me hesitated to fire. His body looked so tempting, and I had certainly not forgotten all those hot nights we had spent together...

I did fire eventually. It was a perfect chance to get rid of my mortal enemy once and for all, yet he proved to be much faster than I had expected. He rolled aside quickly, avoiding all my laser blasts with astonishingly accurate movements, seeking cover behind some lofty rocks nearby (well, maybe I wasn't shooting my best shots), until he accidentally hit his head on a sharp boulder. That was the end of the fight.

I approached carefully and observed his motionless body on the ground. I could have got rid of him right at that moment, but I just lowered my armed hand. Then I sat on a rock, sunk in my thoughts, trying to clear out my feelings and what I would finally do. Right then Rose made her appearance again, through the trees in the distance.

“That was a hell of a fight!” she said as she came near, her blue eyes shining with excitement.

“I have won but I feel so perplexed; I suppose I could have killed him but... this wouldn't solve anything”, I tried to excuse myself. “If he were dead, his younger brother would

take his place and I would probably need a couple of years to adapt to his mentality and ways of action".

"And I guess he isn't be so good-looking", added Rose.

A spectral, oddly glimmering coach with two black horses appeared out of nowhere. It approached fast, it stopped when it reached Rose and a carved door opened before her. She got in with graceful movements, the door closed, and the horses started to gallop again, until the strange vehicle was wrapped in dust and disappeared from sight.

There was nothing else for me to do there. So, I left the planet as soon as possible, with a false identity card, in a spacecraft of public transport, just as I had planned.

* * * * *

Next morning Jay woke up with an unusual feeling of excitement. *I need to talk to Emma,* he thought smiling.

"I had a very vivid dream last night; it was a whole adventure on another planet, where I was a different person with a different name…" he explained to me later.

"So did I", I interrupted calm. "I dreamt of another planet, where I was somebody else and my name was..."

"Sandra Anderson!" we said in unison.

"And I was a prince, known as..." went on Jay.

"Venor of Yrkania", we said in unison.

Then there was silence. My cousin didn't say anything more about his dream adventure and neither did I. Better so...

Before leaving for England, Jay paid me one more visit and brought me a present. It was a lovely, porcelain image of Marilyn Monroe in a fine, white dress flapping in air waves. I smiled and thanked him with a warm kiss on the cheek.

Story Four: Hallucinations

originally handwritten
from 3rd to 20th September, 1992

"When will you find a boyfriend at last, Emma?" aunt Louise asked, in a most ironic voice.

"Never!" I answered and got out of the room at once. *Who does she think she is, after all?* I thought furious.

Anyway, the opinion of a fat whale like aunt Louise doesn't really bother me. What do they actually know about me, all those backbiters of relatives and neighbours? I pondered while lying on my bed. *They wouldn't even imagine that...*

* * * * *

This time I, Sandra Anderson, had to work as an artist dancer at a specific night club on the asteroid Elfarr. At least, that was my cover occupation. However, at times I wasn't at all sure what I was doing there exactly...

I was performing a dancing act together with other artists, when I suddenly felt a violent grasp around my waist, pulling me violently behind the stage. Nevertheless, under the endless torrent of light effects, deafening music and loud voices of drunk patrons, I don't think anyone noticed.

After the initial embarrassment, I twisted my body fast, got free of the man's embrace and came face to face with the hot-blooded stranger who, to my astonishment, proved to be no stranger at all: It was the prince Venor of Yrkania.

I can't tell exactly why, but my immediate reaction was to stick my body to his in a rather provocative way, and give

him a long, passionate kiss, that certainly took him off guard.

“What... what are you doing here, Sandra?” he wanted to know, as soon as he could.

“What are *you* doing here, Venor?” I asked back, wondering how he had discovered my whereabouts this time.

“Wherever you are, there is trouble”, he said stern. “But... how can you stand working in a place like this?”

“What's wrong about the place, Venor?” I asked, pretending not to understand.

“It's a whorehouse! And even worse!”

“Yes, it is! And you know what? I enjoy this job a lot! Now, will you excuse me? Patrons are waiting!”

I walked away at once and soon I was in the main hall, immersed in thick wisps of smoke, loud voices and vulgar laughter. I actually felt relieved when I reached the patrons’ table.

Yet, my mood changed as soon as I had a better look at their faces. All four were scarred and ugly, with dark eyes that concealed terrible secrets. They weren't shouting or laughing, nor drinking. Their behaviour was enigmatic, so was the attitude of the waitress: She served them eagerly but I had to keep on waiting, as she seemed to ignore me completely. She was very young, with a strangely innocent face, dressed in a long, gray, embroidered garment – certainly not the kind of outfit a waitress would be expected to wear in a place like this. She wore her long, black hair in plaits; a yellow feather was fixed on the blue ribbon on her head. *An aborigine?* I wondered, while she kept on delaying my order with blank excuses like “Just a moment”, “I’ll be right back” and so on.

Then I noticed some other waitresses serving tables nearby; they were all giving me malevolent, ironic looks, as if they were in collusion. *Something is very, very wrong*, I thought apprehensive.

“Why aren't you serving me?” I asked the “aborigine”.

“Just wait a second,” she answered mockingly and I got so angry, that I could no longer control myself.

“That's it, I'm leaving!” I exclaimed and stood up, with the intention of aborting the mission right away.

Nevertheless, I changed my mind almost at once and decided to go and see the general manager instead. Some of the waitresses sought to prevent me from going up the wooden stairs, but it was not hard for me to by-pass them.

Soon I was in front of the general manager's white door. For a moment or two I hesitated; then I walked past. *What's the point of protesting about the waitresses, anyway? He won't pay any heed to me, or, even worse, he will get mad – with unpredictable consequences*, I thought.

I went up another flight of stairs and turned the first door knob (had they forgotten to lock?) without thinking about it at all. I entered a spacious, white room with many partitions – a bed in every one of them. In there, before my eyes, some of the security guards were fucking some of the waitresses. *Maybe I could blackmail them with this*, it occurred to me.

Next moment they all stood up and begun chasing me out of the room. I ran fast along the corridor and got out, to the balcony, through a small window. Three of the security guards came too close, but I got rid of them with a set of side-kicks. Right after, I stepped aside and hid behind the wall on my right. The rest of the enemies thought I had jumped down, so they quit on me.

I took two steps across the dirty balcony and sprang on the

tiled roof of an adjacent building; then I jumped down to a narrow, stone alley and ran along it until I reached the wooden door of an old edifice.

Hearing some of my persecutors approaching, I decided to go up the few stairs and knock on the door. A tall, thin, middle-aged man appeared at the threshold.

"I am tired of travelling and I would like to rest for a while," I excused myself awkwardly.

He allowed me to get in, without asking any questions. It was an old-time saloon with wooden furniture. The place was full of smoke and shady patrons, nevertheless I felt comfortable in there, as if I were in my element. When I sat at the bar, I was offered some stale cookies powdered with caster sugar on a white saucer. The napkins were dirty, probably used. There was a black-dressed, sluggish guy with stitches on his face sitting nearby, who kept staring at me with his glassy eyes. Suddenly I felt very worried, and I had the impression that my original mission was just beginning to take a quite unexpected turn...

* * * * *

It must have been something in the cookies; first there was dizziness, then blank. When I came to myself, I was lying on rocks; four coarse faces were gathered around me. I recognized the "patrons" I had run out on in the night club.

"Nobody walks away from us", one of them announced spitefully.

"Even less a whore!" added another one.

"I am not a whore", I protested in a low voice.

I tried to stand up but it was in vain; I felt too weak for that. *Effect of drugs*, I supposed. I repeated my effort nonetheless, but the sound of approaching footsteps made me freeze of

fear. I looked up hesitantly, and saw the prince of Yrkania aiming his laser gun at me. The other men were standing behind him taciturn. *So, they are Venor's spies*, I realized and my dizziness got worse.

“Don't shoot, Venor”, I said in a low voice.

“I don't intend to harm you, Sandra”, he reassured me. “I only want to know what you've found out so far”.

“What do you mean?” I exclaimed. “There is nothing really interesting on Elfarr… and you've been watching me during all that time?!”

“Sure!”

He came nearer and grasped my arm firm. I tried to stand up once again but I only cried of pain, while my chest was trembling. Feeling so sad and vulnerable, I could not help bursting into tears, as I ended up in Venor's arms.

“What…? Sandra!” he exclaimed in wonder but didn't refuse me the hug.

My legs could no longer hold me, so he had to take me in his strong arms, as I was falling in deep sleep again. Effect of drugs...

* * * * *

High mountains with steep, purple sides; a winding river shimmering below; sparse vegetation among the jagged rocks; a huge, golden moon framed by bluish clouds; the wonderful night landscape enchanted me as I woke up and sat up on a smooth cliff. Venor was standing at the edge of the precipice, the gigantic moon shining brightly behind him. He turned and faced me at once, as if he had just sensed my awakening. Before I could think of anything, he was already beside me.

“I want to know what you have discovered in that night

club", he asked again, in a commanding voice.

"Nothing of importance", I replied sincerely. "I just saw some security guards having sex with waitresses -that's all!"

"Tell me!" he insisted, about to lose his patience.

"This is all I know! Why don't you believe me?" I protested.

At that point he tried to slap me but I parried the blow with a fast grip of his wrist. There followed a short fight, during which I was astounded at my inability to defend myself properly, since I was still feeling unusually weak. I had the impression every part of my body weighed a tone or something. Just then it occurred to me that *everything* was very wrong on that planet, and that was not just effect of drugs. Before I knew it, I was hanging at the edge of the precipice. Steep rocks and winding fiords emerged far below – an enchanting view that meant certain death. Venor was standing a few inches away, staring at me in ironic satisfaction, while my fingers were already slipping off the mossy cliff.

"Pull me up, Venor!" I cried but he just stayed still, watching me with a dark face.

My agony grew moment by moment, as my time seemed to be running out. *So, maybe this just the end of the line...* I thought as my grip on the rock began to loosen.

He barely reached out clasp my hands, just a second before I let go. He lifted me up with considerable ease and I felt actually grateful to him, as soon as my feet touched solid ground again.

"I don't know what is going on here on Elfarr" I confessed right after, "but something is very wrong; everything here has become rather unpredictable, as if it were not the same world anymore".

He just stared at me taciturn, probably expecting me to say more.

“That's all I've found out so far”, I went on. “I need to investigate more, but... do *you* happen to know anything about it?” I asked suspiciously.

His eyes narrowed and the sinister expression on his face meant nothing good. I could sense he was not satisfied at all with what I had just confided to him.

I was certainly in no position to defend myself in any fight now. All I wanted was to run away, just run away, but I froze in my position instead. I thought about asking Venor what he wanted to hear from me exactly, but I didn't utter a word, as the whole environment around us seemed to be changing rapidly, in a most unnatural manner.

* * * * *

It wasn't long before the place looked like some inhospitable desert of Maelstrom, studded with azure rocks and distant violet mountains; an impressive blue moon was dominant in the night sky.

I could no longer see him, but Venor's triumphant voice echoed all around: “This game is over, Sandra! You may as well use all your knowledge, abilities and powers, but you can never win here, because you are not on Elfarr anymore! You are in one of my cosmoids!”

My heart sank as soon as I heard those words, for I knew very well what a cosmoid is: a kind of cyberspace creation, a super-advanced hologram that can sneak in the real world, interweave itself with any natural setting, manipulate minds and cause all kinds of illusions, hallucinations, and unimaginable problems to living beings. And, yes, Venor was right: it was impossible for me to prevail there, for I wasn't the creator, not even a simple user of the cosmoid; in

there I was just a pawn, prone to fall into any kind of trouble and suffer any possible misfortune – which had already happened to me many times so far. Despair took over me, but if I gave in to it, that would mean my end. Somehow, I had to react...

Next moment I had to run and take cover behind a holographic, yet pretty solid bluish rock, in order to avoid the laser beams of some Yrkanian warriors who had just appeared out of nowhere. I barely managed to ward off two of them, who had got too near: I twisted my body fast and hit the first one with my right elbow on the chin; I got rid of the second one with a low side kick. Then I sought cover between two high rocks that jutted aggressively off the ground. However, more Yrkanian soldiers were already approaching. It was impossible for me to tell which of those were real and which "digital", but all laser beams were mortal and so could be their martial art blows. Next instant a luminous ray struck my body; a scorching inner flame interrupted my sense of being.

When I recovered, I saw Venor knelt by me, and I wondered how long he had been there. I guess he too often asks himself, why he is usually so irresolute about my fate – all those times he has had the chance to get rid of me...

At that moment, a strong thud interrupted the ominous silence. A big cloud of azure dust was raised among the corroded rocks. I couldn't believe my eyes, when I realized it was Peter of the Stars, who had just appeared out of the blue -literally! I couldn't imagine how he had managed to arrive there just in time, but I was so glad he had done so! His sudden appearance distracted Venor only for a moment; then he turned and aimed his gun at my precious ally and lover, and so did all the Yrkanian soldiers.

While I was trying to regain full consciousness, Peter was

striving to dodge the joint attack of the enemies: I saw him springing from rock to rock, performing impressive somersaults on air, disarming four of them with impressive flying kicks and unpredictable punches on their astonished faces.

In the real world he may have already neutralized all of them, but not in a cosmoid. Venor was swift in manipulating his holographic creation: He fired at the looming rocks nearby and Peter soon found himself suffocating under fragments of cliffs that seemed to be collapsing all over him. I stood up at once and pounced at the prince, but I didn't even have the time to figure out how he threw me down like an empty sack. After a strong punch on the face, I lost my senses -again.

When I recovered, my head was spinning and I could see the cosmoid was changing once more. I gasped in desperation as I realized I was tied in chains between two huge rocks that seemed to be moving slowly towards each other, while Venor was watching full of sick complacence.

I cried in terror, as there seemed to be no escape from this. *Is this how it all ends? No, I can't let it happen...* I thought, as I could feel a strange heat taking me gradually. *But... where is Peter? Peter?*

At that moment the heat changed into a strong sense of electric surge that filled me up. I smiled as I recognized the *power* coming back to me just when I needed it most…

First, the two rocks stopped moving and they were reduced to dust within a split second; then, my chains were broken and I was free. Venor pulled out his weapon and fired immediately, but he cried in astonishment when he realized it was out of order.

I looked around impatiently, searching for Peter. He was still

under heavy stones that were now beginning to press his chest. Just like I had done a few seconds before, I reduced them to dust too, using the *power* of my mind. I ran to him at once and helped him stand up. He breathed out in relief, and we kissed passionately for a few moments I wished they would last forever.

In the meanwhile, Venor was running away, but it wasn't at all difficult for us to keep up with him and give him a good lesson...

* * * * *

“How come you appeared just when I needed you most? And how did you find me?” I asked Peter later.

“I was informed by a good agent of mine!” he replied and pointed at a young woman who was just approaching.

This time she was wearing a red, tight-fitting dress and a red ribbon on her black hair. It was the “aborigine” waitress who had refused to serve me at the night club. I had met her on Eldyla once, but strangely enough I couldn't recognize her at the night club. *Of course, that was one of the least peculiar things that had happened to me while on Elfarr...*

Then I noticed the strange artifact she was holding in her hands. It looked like a spherical, crystal vase with ruby flowers, but in reality it was a *dimensional conduit* in camouflage, which would help us travel from Elfarr to Eldyla instantly.

“I must admit I was amazed at the way you set yourself and me free from Venor's cosmoid”, Peter told me then. “I didn't consider it possible for us to escape from that kind of mental trap!”

“Don't let them deceive you”, I replied calm. “You are much stronger than you think!”

Story Five: Starship Regina

originally handwritten
from 25th September to 15th October, 1992

I, Emma, was feeling quite cheerful as I was leaving school this afternoon; I could hear a buzz of cheerful voices filling the spring air all around. The tall trees were in blossom, their rich foliage rustling in the gusts of wind. A luxurious, open, red car was speeding along the road; the young, beautiful couple inside looked so happy; I could hear them speaking and laughing aloud, enjoying the ride, the fine weather and their love affair.

For a moment I froze, as it occurred to me that I am never meant to experience such happiness. I just can't imagine myself inside such an impressive car with such a handsome boyfriend. *No, such pleasures are not for me; but other kinds of bliss are*, I realized then and felt much better. You see...

I am

an abandoned, icy planet

dimly lit by a dark sun,

doomed in eternal eclipse

above endless frozen oceans;

Still time

rules in old-forgotten tombs,

unholy secrets lurking deep;

not a sound to be heard,

not a soul to fly around.

I don't know how this weird verse came into my mind all at once, but I needed to go home and have a nap urgently...

* * * * *

Being on the red lately I, Sandra Anderson, had to earn some money fast and there was only one way I could do this quickly and effectively.

When night came, I put on good clothes and jewels, that is I dressed myself as a lady, and visited one of the most popular casinos in the city of Rubbia, the capital of the homonymous planet which orbits the star Alphagen.

The planet used to be completely abandoned by humans, after the massive assault of the android tribe of Olrons. However, during the last five Rubbican years, things had changed radically: Humans were allowed to live peacefully on the planet again, after the Olrons had entered into a very special treaty with an "enlightened" human governor.

Anyway, I had never been at that part of the known universe before but, just in case, I got in the casino with a false identity card. When I sat at the roulette table, I felt a little uneasy as I was the only woman among smartly-dressed men who were playing high stakes; they all looked down on me as if I were a mere nuisance.

In the beginning I lost some money, then I earned some, and so on; I didn't want to arouse suspicions right from the start. After a couple of hours I got bored and decided it was time for some real action – now that the *power* was getting stronger and stronger inside me.

I decided to play all my money on eleven black. So, I concentrated on the number eleven black and fixed my

attention on the rotating roulette, taking advantage of its hypnotizing effect. Number eleven black won. Next I played zero, then ten, twenty, fourteen -always black. Pretty soon a considerable pile of marks was gathered in front of me, before the amazed eyes of the other players. It was time I took the winnings and fled...

The cashier's room was oddly decorated with old fashioned, wooden furniture and antique household articles. I sensed something was wrong right from the start, as soon as the cashier gave me a slimy smile and said:

“Quite a few marks, my fair lady; seldom does a woman appear alone in here and even more seldom does she earn such a considerable sum of money!”

“But this is not any woman; this is Sandra Anderson”, declared a tall man who had just entered, accompanied by another one. I was astounded to notice they were both wearing the dark gray uniform of the Yrkanian police.

“I'm sure Miss Anderson will stay quiet and co-operate”, said the cashier. Obviously, he didn't want any trouble.

“After all, you are a real lady now, Miss Anderson, aren't you?” mocked the second policeman.

Just what I needed right now, I thought and sighed in disappointment. I certainly didn't expect to be recognized so fast here, in Rubbia...

Right after, I faced them exclaimed: “Let me be a real lady then, using her lady's weapons!”

I grasped a big frying pan which was hanging on the wall on my left and attacked the policemen wildly, with a furious scream. That took the enemies by surprise, so I managed to hit the first policeman on the head, while the other one was trying to take cover. Then I got away, running like crazy in the hazy night. Not only was I still broke, but an alarm had

just been set for me all over the planet.

* * * * *

Away from the buzzing cities, Rubbia offered breathtaking landscapes; endless, green hills studded with ancient, gold-roofed temples; high, steep cliffs emerging from topaz waters; traditional fishing boats, decorated with motley parasols, floating among the reefs under a blue, bright sky – illusory, natural magic that only concealed the turmoil and violence dominating underneath.

I would have left the planet as soon as possible, but I suddenly received a message from Peter of the Stars, saying we should meet at a secret place outside the city, because the whole of planet Rubbia was in extreme danger; what kind of danger, he didn't specify. What was most important, though, was the fact that Rubbia is very close to Eldyla. Peter wanted me to help him eliminate that danger and I certainly couldn't say no...

Therefore, we finally arranged a meeting in the courtyard of the Supreme Temple, which is usually full of visitors who come to admire the beauty of the place and/or pray to the deities worshiped there.

Nevertheless, I was never meant to meet Peter in that holy place. When I arrived there that evening, Peter was outside the courtyard and he was in trouble. As I found out soon, there was a duel going on – I mean Peter against a tall, black-haired warrior with green eyes. Another warrior, with blond hair and a beautiful face, was watching the fight patiently.

"What have you done this time, Peter?" I asked in a stern voice.

"He stole a laser sword!" replied the blond warrior.

"And he is not willing to give it back to me!" added the

black-haired duelist angrily.

“Not without a fight!” uttered Peter, smiling cunningly.

“The rogue wants a duel and he is going to have it! He needs a good lesson!” said the blond warrior.

I did agree to that, so I decided to let the duel go on.

Peter lifted the laser sword and stood on guard, ready to defend himself, with an expression of thrill on his face. There were thick tree trunks behind him, glowing oddly in the bright lights of the temple. The king of Eldyla looked more fascinating than ever in that enchanting natural setting.

“Come on, Alex, give him the lesson he deserves!” cried the blond warrior then.

The fight began right after, with the dark-haired warrior attacking first. Peter dodged the blow and retaliated at once. Soon the warrior seemed to be perplexed at the young man's skills, who kept on resisting with fast and accurate movements. For some long minutes both swords flashed dangerously with every strike. Peter looked worried because Alex proved to be more than a worthy opponent. Soon Peter had to resort to a more aggressive and more risky technique.

“The young trump is not bad, not bad at all”, the blond warrior admitted, after he had approached me -too close, maybe. “But he is going to lose!” he concluded in a teasing tone.

“We'll see about that!” I retorted.

“My name is Hadrian”, he told me then, giving me a sweet look.

Suddenly there was a shining behind the tree trunks and the blond one shouted: “Watch out! Olrons!”

Next moment the place was flooded with laser beams. Both duelists ducked, rolled on the ground and had a narrow

escape, taking cover behind the courtyard walls. The other warrior and I had no time to do so; we both pulled out our laser guns, ready to fight for our lives, while an indefinite number of bulky droids -more metal than human- were cropping up all around us.

Acting instinctively, I raised my laser weapon and stood back to back with the blond guy. We started firing successive, very accurate laser beams that exterminated all droids one by one. When it was all over, I could hardly believe we had actually done it.

“They are all destroyed! That was incredible!” exclaimed Alex, having just left his cover.

“That was a hell of a fight, dear Miss...” said Hadrian, smiling to me.

“Sandra Anderson”, I introduced myself.

“Oooh!” he responded in wonder. “You are quite famous here, Miss Anderson!”

“I suppose so”, I replied amused. “What was that?” I asked right after.

“That was what I was going to tell you about”, said Peter then, giving the laser sword back to Alex. “These two guys are from the renowned Starship Regina. We could use their help, that's why I sought to attract their attention!”

“We could use *your* help!” retorted Hadrian somewhat irritated, but Peter paid no heed.

* * * * *

The Starship Regina proved to be one of the biggest space vessels I had ever seen – maybe the biggest. It was enormous in size, fully and excellently equipped as a military space battleship, the only one which had survived the destruction of the human colonies, and the most serious

opponent of the Olrons ever since.

As about the Olrons, they were a tribe of android warriors, who were programmed to extinguish the human race all over the known universe. They had their own space battleship too, and they roamed the galaxies seeking for more human races to annihilate. They had already destroyed hundreds of worlds, Rubbia being their first victim, five decades ago. In my opinion, though, the strangest thing about them is that their leader has often been a human being.

Moreover, certain things had changed recently: The Olrons had become even more powerful and organized, ever since they had allied with a mysterious, "enlightened" governor.

"Venor, the throne prince of Yrkania, is now their leader and our archenemy", explained Damien, Commander of the Starship Regina.

So, that's why there are humans on Rubbia again: Most of them are Yrkanians who collaborate with the Olrons one way or another, I figured out.

"Maybe we can destroy the Olrons' military starship; it's probably the only way to hold them at bay for a very long time", I proposed.

"How do you think you can destroy such a starship? It has been too difficult even for us, you know, all these years!" opposed Damien, a tone of annoyance in his voice.

"How do you intend to achieve this?" Captain Alexander wanted to know.

"I have a plan! But you have to trust me!"

* * * * *

"I just don't get it", complained Peter while I was piloting a stolen Olron space vessel to their military starship.

“Couldn't we do anything else but go straight into the lions' den?”

“I suppose we could” I replied calm, “but I want Venor out of there before it becomes an exploding inferno!”

“But... that would be a unique chance to get rid of him once and for all!”

“Well, that would be too easy and too cowardly. I can't do this to my beloved archenemy”, I joked awkwardly.

“Oh, Sandra”, Peter sighed frowning. “Why did you dye your hair green?” he changed the subject abruptly, giving me an askance look.

“Because I felt like dying it green”, I replied sharp. “Have you understood the plan well, Peter?”

“It's not much of a plan, actually. Hadrian and I will set the explosive device; Alexander and you will arrest Venor!”

“Good! And we'll have to improvise about details!”

“Sure”, he sighed again.

Since we were in an Olrons' spacecraft, we didn't have much difficulty in entering their starship. Taking extreme care not to be seen by the droids, moving silently and carefully, we managed to proceed without being detected. So far it had been easier than expected, but everything had to be done as fast as possible.

Hadrian and Peter got to main computer; Peter of the Stars hacked it in no time and he was about to program the starship's self-destruction. Alexander and I ran to the governor's -Venor's- chamber of throne. Peter had almost finished his job on the computer, when a deep, echoing voice interrupted his thoughts:

“Did you really think you would get away with this, Peter?”

“Venor!” exclaimed Peter startled.

The enemy had just sprung up behind a bulky piece of machinery and he was armed with two laser weapons.

“Step away from the computer now!” he ordered with fiery eyes.

Peter obeyed and raised his hands in surrender.

“I have you, at last!” cried Venor in triumph.

The prince fired right after, but Peter was no longer there; before the enemy's eyes, he jumped up and sprang among the machines with incredibly flexible movements that stunned his opponent for a couple of seconds. That was all the time Peter needed to counterattack with an impressive somersault on air, landing on Venor's chest and knocking him down, both guns swept away from his hands.

Right after, Peter sought to regain his balance and locate the guns at the same time. Yet, Venor wouldn't give up so easily; with a swift movement, he grabbed one of his weapons again and fired immediately. Peter barely had the time to step aside, the laser ray slightly burning his left shoulder. The electric shock was enough to make him lose his senses. Venor stood up at once and aimed at the unconscious man for one last time.

“This is your end, Peter of the Stars!” he whispered impatient.

Just then Lieutenant Hadrian appeared with his laser sword in hand, and stroke Venor in the back with his luminous blade. After the enemy had collapsed to the floor, Hadrian approached Peter, and sought to feel his heart. To his great relief, it was still pounding.

In the meanwhile, Alexander and I had failed to find Venor in the throne chamber. We had only met and destroyed

numerous droids along the metal corridors. Yet, more of them would come for us very soon, so we had to finish our job fast. Entering a vast room full of machinery, we saw Peter and Hadrian standing over Venor's lying body. As we approached, we found out the prince was not unconscious but in semi-torpor, his face a mask of pain, tears in his eyes.

“What's the matter with him?” I asked.

“He was going to kill Peter, although he had surrendered; so, I attacked him with my laser sword”, explained Hadrian.

“His back is broken!” added Peter.

“So, he has been lying here with a broken back all this time?” I shuddered.

“Don't leave me like this... I would never do such a thing to you”, said Venor then, in a trembling voice. “Kill me instead!”

I just couldn't bear seeing him in that condition any longer, and it was just then that I began to feel the *power* again – very strong this time.

“This will be over soon, Venor”, I reassured him. “There will be no more pain”.

“No more pain?” he repeated in wonder, his eyes shining with a feeble hope.

“No more”.

I raised my right hand slowly and pointed my palm at him. A thick astral ray emanated from there, covering Venor's body with a white, ethereal glow. He let a soft cry for a moment; then, he was completely silent.

“Thank you”, he said in a low voice.

The cure was complete and the glow was gone.

“Now, let's finish the work we are here to do!” said Peter,

and approached the main computer impatiently.

Right at that moment, droids' steps echoed all around, coming nearer and nearer.

“No time for this! We must get out of here now!” exclaimed Alexander, pulling out his laser weapon.

I am not even sure I saw this, but I had the impression Peter did something on the computer at once – maybe he pressed some of the keys, very-very fast...

“Let's go now! Quick!” he announced then, in an enigmatic voice.

We had to fight very hard in there, one group of droids after the other; the Olrons were just too many, lurking for us in every corner, and more often than not I thought it would be impossible for us to get out of there alive.

The last fight, after we had finally discovered an exit to the hangar at the end of a long corridor, proved to be one of the hardest in my life. We were being pursued by a dozen of droids, all firing at us continuously. Peter and I used our martial art skills almost instinctively, performing incredible dodges and high jumps, springing from wall to wall, turning and firing at the metal enemies while still on air, or after landing on the floor only for a split second. Venor was unarmed, of course, and just sought to keep himself alive. Alexander and Hadrian were fighting like heroes.

I suppose, what saved us -apart from sheer luck- was our perfectly concerted movements; each one of us was covering the others every moment, all of us firing at all directions, destroying most of the swarming Olrons, until we were finally inside the hangar, aiming to steal another spacecraft and get away at once.

* * * * *

Venor was to be held as a prisoner in the Starship Regina; however, it wasn't long before he somehow managed to escape hidden in a small laundry-spacecraft heading for Rubbia. By the time we found this out, it was already too late.

Besides, there was other urgent work to be done: Since our mission had failed, we had to figure out another way of destroying the Olrons' space battleship. Everybody on the bridge of Regina looked rather disappointed, apart from Peter, who -strangely enough- seemed to beam with optimism.

“Now!” he exclaimed and everyone looked at him in wonder.

“Now, what?” Commander Damien wondered.

“Bring the Olrons' starship on the main screen! Now, or we'll miss the fun!”

Hadrian sighed and Alexander lowered his head in frustration. However, Commander Damien gave the order and the Olrons' military base was shown on the screen. Not a sound was heard in the room, nobody stirred…

Suddenly, there was a white flash all over the Olrons' military base and its outer surface cracked in thousands of burning fissures. Within a second or two, the whole starship was swallowed in a kind of silent explosion, until there was nothing left of it in the starlit space.

Peter smiled in triumph; the look in his eyes bore out my suspicions: Right at the last moment, he had managed to program the Olrons’ main computer so as to initiate the starship's self-destruction – and that with time delay! Isn't he incredible?

I can't tell why, but suddenly I felt terrible exhaustion and I knew I were about to pass out. My eyes blurred, I no longer

knew where I was; a sudden vertigo overtook me and I sank into unconsciousness...

* * * * *

When I, Emma, woke up again that afternoon, all that unbelievable astral adventure was still streaming in my mind. I sat up on my bed and relished a rare feeling of bliss all over me.

A few seconds later, I absent-mindedly looked at the opposite wall and, like mesmerized, I was engrossed in that lovely painting made by my godmother when I was born, thirteen years ago. It shows an ethereal fairy wearing a long, azure gown and a dark blue belt around her slim waist. She has fine crimson shoes on and she is gracefully running away from a pirate ship barely discernible in the distance. She has a sweet smile on her face, and her red hair is wavy in the air, as she is passing by some naked trees wreathed in a hazy atmosphere. I guess this is happiness...

Story Six: Alien Dimensions

originally handwritten
from 17th October to 24th November, 1992

It seemed to be just another boring school day until Mark, our new mathematics teacher, came in class. He was young and gorgeous, no older than thirty; he had blond hair and green sparkling eyes, and an air of dandy all around him. He had been teaching in our school for two weeks now, all girls were already dreaming about him but...

Soon he proved to be rather wayward, strict and often offensive towards the students. Once again this morning he spent most of the lesson mocking those classmates who couldn't do well in mathematics, especially girls.

“Females do better in language and literature”, he said. “But when brains are needed, that is in sciences, males perform a lot better!”

“This is due to prejudices of centuries, sir”, said Nena, the best girl student in our class.

“It has to do with intelligence!” he retorted.

“A hundred years ago, if a girl was good in math, she was considered to be abnormal”, said Geena – a shy, mediocre student nobody liked.

He only looked at her scornfully, without giving up his lover-boy attitude even for an instant.

At that point I, Emma, decided to give him a lesson. I raised my head and looked at him intently; he noticed at once, and for a moment he froze. I focused my attention deep into his

emerald eyes -and he was mine...

* * * * *

I was running along the spacious veranda of a small yet magnificent mansion, with my gun in hand. I was being chased by someone who looked a lot like Mark but I knew he was much more dangerous.

I, Sandra Anderson, had trespassed his private property with a view to arresting him, for that was the latest mission I had undertaken. My hair was dyed blond and I was wearing casual clothes, which had allowed me not to attract any unwanted attention for a few days on that asteroid, until I could locate my target. However, he had found out about me too soon and now he was after me, firing continuously with his laser weapon. He name was Trevor, and he was a notorious criminal all over the galaxy.

Soon I had to leave the luxurious veranda and take cover behind one of the thick, black, decorative columns surrounding the swimming pool.

“I will find you, Sandra Anderson, no matter where you hide!” I heard him shouting threateningly, as he was getting closer and closer.

Then I realized he was right; there was no other place for me to hide nearby, so I just stayed there waiting for him to approach.

The mansion was built underground, in the middle of a godforsaken tundra. In fact, the whole asteroid was a tundra: Immense expanses with poor vegetation, studded by odd-shaped hills, sparsely inhabited by primitive nomads who minded only their own business.

The tundra was Trevor's den. He had found refuge there because it was very far away from any other inhabited planet and no Intergalactic Police would ever be interested

in looking for anything or anyone on that nameless asteroid. In fact, I had to make intensive use of my mental powers in order to locate his hideout and its secret entrance. Therefore, I was feeling pretty strained and tired now. Under such circumstances, Trevor could prove to be an awfully hard opponent...

However, I still had a very special advantage over him: I looked much like his one and only love, now dead for years. Just like sunlight, her love made him feel alive, strong, invulnerable. Then, she died of a rare disease, leaving him all alone in the darkness of space. I guess she has become a hazy dream by now, yet I can sense he still tries to revive his dream in the eternal penumbra of the asteroid. Not all wounds are cured by time...

I sought to run to another column before he had come too close, but it proved to be in vain. He had already reached me, aiming a laser gun at me, his eyes narrowed with decisiveness. Without saying a word, I just put my gun down on the floor and pushed it away; then I surrendered.

“What are you going to do?” I asked solemn, as he was taking me inside the mansion.

“I don't know yet”, he replied. “I usually kill intruders; I can't risk my hideout being revealed”.

“How many have found out your hideout so far?” I wondered.

“Not many... but you, Sandra Anderson, are here to arrest me, right?” he went on in a rough voice.

“So, you know who I am...”

“Of course I do…” he replied in an enigmatic tone. “Is there anything you haven't done in your life yet, Sandra?” he asked me then.

“No”, I answered sincerely. *Strange question; maybe my advantage is working already*, I reckoned.

* * * * *

To my great surprise, we were to fight a duel. Trevor made it clear he didn't wish to kill me in cold blood; as he said, “Only a fair fight is the right way for worthy opponents to settle their differences”.

When we finally entered the dimly lit basement, I was startled at the sound of the slamming steel door behind me. Suddenly, Trevor wasn't behind me anymore; I looked around at once but he was nowhere to see, as if he had vanished into nothingness. I was certain he wouldn't play unfair, so he wasn't going to shoot me before I had found a weapon to defend myself. Therefore, I was in full alert, but not in agony.

No sooner had I found a primitive firearm left in a dark corner than I had to run along narrow corridors formed by enigmatic pieces of machinery, in order to dodge a beam of mortal laser rays. *He is not so fair after all*, I realized – not without a certain disappointment. I crept to the far end of a long, metal catwalk and hid myself in the shadows, anxiously waiting for his next move.

For a few seconds, a sinister silence reigned all over the place. Then there was a hiss and a very heavy weight fell on my shoulders; it was Trevor. I cried of pain and the firearm slipped off my hands; nevertheless, I managed to fight off my opponent for a few long minutes. A sharp blow on his face made him lose his grip on me for a second; that was all the time I needed to stand on my feet again and run away from him.

Soon he was after me along those narrow corridors; he was armed with a laser weapon, his footsteps echoing all over

the bleak basement, carrying his growing anger like a heatwave. All of a sudden, I ended up in a dead end. No way out. I looked up, hoping to find a way to climb up, but those pieces of machinery were too lofty and their surfaces too flat. My heart was pounding like a drum, as Trevor's chuckle echoed abnormally loud in my ears.

Nevertheless, when he reached the end of that corridor, he was astounded to find out I was nowhere to see. He froze for a second; then, the clicking sound of a weapon pierced the sullen silence. He raised his head and gave me an astonished look as he saw me throwing a heavy iron bar at him. Thick laser beams, coming out of his gun, tore the half-darkness of the basement for a couple of seconds; right after, a cry of pain and a thud followed.

Although I didn't believe I had actually made it, I had exerted myself and managed to climb up those masses of metal. *Maybe the power is returning to me little by little*, I pondered.

A few minutes later, he stood up stunned and faced my firearm threatening him. In his wide open blue eyes I could discern acknowledgment of defeat.

“You won't do it, Sandra!” he said, trying to conceal his desperation.

“Try me!” I challenged him.

He shut his eyes for a moment; then, he heard me say: “It's time we got out of here! And don't try anything stupid!”

* * * * *

As I was crossing the main hall of the mansion, always pointing my firearm at Trevor's back, all of a sudden I felt quite uneasy and my self-confidence was gone. My opponent seemed to have accepted his fate too easily, and I could sense something was wrong; surely I had expected

him to fight harder. *This isn't over at all; Trevor must certainly have more surprises in store for me*, it occurred to me then.

Next instant a laser ray singed my hand, making me cry of pain and loosen the grasp on my weapon. Trevor turned round and punched me hard on the face, while four armed androids, all covered in metal, entered the room from four different doors. It was one of them who had fired, very well-aimed indeed. I must admit, it was too naive of me to suppose Trevor would be all alone in there…

Next moment I was lying on the floor helpless, surrounded by enemies, my weapon in Trevor's hands, plus four laser guns pointing at me. *Can this get any worse?* I wondered in despair, feeling abnormally numb, completely unable to move. It all seemed like a frozen cinema scene to me: The front door, as well as my success in this mission, was only a few metres away – but now everything was lost, as if I had just entered another, sinister dimension.

Right then I noticed a gigantic fresco on the wall opposite the front door: it showed three old-time ladies standing in a circle, chatting or planning something. They were wearing long, fine dresses with revealing V-necks and hats of the same colors -gray, red and blue. Though beautiful, it was an entirely foreign element, alien to that place. *Was it there before?* I wondered in bewilderment.

Moments lapsed in anguish; I was ordered to stand up, while time seemed to pass extremely slowly, and I knew this was a sign for radical changes; I strained my senses waiting… Trevor, I, and the droids seemed to be completely motionless, frozen in time, as something alien seemed to be reaching in from another dimension. I held my breath, my heart lost a leap – and then the whole setting was torn apart, as if it were a paper poster. Trevor stood still just watching it

happen – a world being revealed inside a world...

* * * * *

As soon as my vision cleared, I was astounded at the magical landscape unfolding before my eyes: A purple velvet sky over a green forest, mysteriously illuminated by a weird, bright rainbow; a fascinating waterfall coming down a black mountain in the background; the topaz waters of a lake, rhythmically agitated in the winds of the nightfall. No doubt, the place was Eldyla...

Naturally, Peter was there, watching and waiting.

“What have you done this time, Peter?” I wanted to know.

“I used the Ethereal Flame to create a dimensional vortex”, he replied calm, as if it were the simplest thing in the world.

“How did you find me?” I asked then.

“I have your genetic imprint...”

“Do you realize how dangerous this can be?” I snapped at him right after. “Let alone you disrupted my mission...”

“...and saved your nice ass”, he interrupted me, trying to keep his composure.

Next moment, there was an instant shining in the rich foliage of the bushes behind Peter; then an imperceptible rustle of leaves. At first I paid no heed; then, I realized:

“He is here!” I uttered in a low voice.

“Who's here?” Peter wondered.

“His name is Trevor and he is wanted by the Intergalactic Police; my latest assignment was to find and arrest him...”

“And what is he doing here?”

“When you created the dimensional vortex, he was standing near me; so, I wasn't the only one who passed through”, I

explained.

“Great”, Peter sighed.

We looked carefully all around, but Trevor was nowhere to see. That didn't make me feel any better.

“Listen, Peter”, I said. “We must find him, the sooner the better. This man is very dangerous. You can hardly imagine what he is capable of...”

“I know, he's rather notorious; and I bet you are looking forward to having him in your hands!” he raised the tone of his voice, in obvious jealousy.

“I have to turn this man over to the Intergalactic Police; he is a criminal!” I replied with a serious mien, emphasizing the last word.

Peter frowned at me.

“Peter”, I said softy, “this man can harm Eldyla. Can't you see?”

“Really? How could he? There is nothing precious for him to steal here!”

“Nothing? He has already seen you can create a dimensional vortex; he will seek to know how you did it, and believe me, he will find out!”

“The Ethereal Flame!”

“Yes, Peter! The Ethereal Flame, the sacred gem which balances all energies in Eldyla and creates dimensional vortexes, might be lost forever!”

“We have to find him! At once!” concluded Peter anxiously.

* * * * *

It wasn't long before we found Trevor: he was hiding in a cavern at the top of a steep hill near the Ancestral Sanctuary. Or, better say, he found us: As we hadn't expected him to move so fast and

come so close to the secret hiding place of the Ethereal Flame so soon, he took us by surprise.

I barely had the time to scream to Peter: “Watch out!”

“What...” uttered Peter stunned, as I pounced on him and dragged him down on the ground, successive laser beams grazing past our heads. We both rolled on the grass as fast as possible and hid behind thick tree trunks, while Trevor emerged behind a big rock with his laser weapon in hand. He stood there for a few moments, scanning the whole place with his frigid eyes, an air of arrogance in his posture.

He attacked with his laser weapon once again, and it was by sheer chance that I escaped death at that time: It so happened that I stumbled on a stone and missed a step just at the correct moment. Peter dodged successive laser rays by performing a set of incredible aerial somersaults among the surrounding rocks.

It was Trevor's turn to be taken by surprise, as he couldn't believe how quick, supple and accurate Peter was on Eldyla; he looked as if he were flying around for a few seconds, jumping from rock to rock and from tree to tree incredibly fast, finally landing on Trevor's shoulders; that made the enemy collapse on the ground and bump his head on a boulder.

He recovered a few minutes later and faced Peter, who was standing over him. The ruler of Eldyla looked triumphant with his legs a little apart, his arms akimbo, beaming self-confidence and warrior's pride.

“You really thought you could get it done, Trevor?” he chuckled. “You are on Eldyla, you know! Nobody beats me here!”

“This is my duel, Peter!” I reminded him. “And I have a mission to accomplish!”

“Oh, sure!” he protested weakly.

At that moment Trevor flounced aside, grasped the laser weapon I had considered lost among the numerous boulders, and opened fire in a frenzy. Both Peter and I sprang up, performed a

perfectly coordinated set of aerial somersaults and took cover behind the lofty rocks outside the entrance of the cavern. Trevor approached cautiously, with the laser weapon in his hands, determined to exterminate both of us on the spot. He looked kinda disappointed as he could see neither of us. He started firing at all the sizeable rocks, reducing them to burning dust one by one. Peter had to leave his hiding place and swarm down the cliffs, all the way to the lagoon beneath, while I was suddenly feeling so wonderfully *powerful*...

After a moment of mutual bewilderment, Trevor was particularly surprised to see me jumping high, over the rock that had protected me till then; I stepped on another rock that still remained intact, and sprang on the air again, intending to assault the enemy at once. A laser ray singed my right thigh but I felt almost nothing; before Trevor's astonished eyes, both my feet landed on chest shoulders in no time, making him lose balance and fall down. He was still holding his laser firearm – but he was too stunned to use it right away. I finished my attack with another impressive aerial somersault and landed on my feet with considerable ease. I smiled in complacence for my *copy body* had unbelievable potentialities, especially in semi-material dimensions, like Eldyla.

Trevor, still numb, was just beginning to realize something very odd was happening. He only stammered "Sandra..." when he saw me emerge behind the rock I was still hiding, while my copy body gradually melted away in the air. Then I watched the muscles of his arms contract under his tight-fitting uniform, and I knew I was in for another one of his laser attacks. *I guess it's time I showed him what I really am*, I reckoned and...

I raised my arms and produced a thick beam of luminous energy, which destroyed Trevor's gun in his hands, leaving him flabbergasted for a couple of seconds. After the initial surprise, he tried to assault me with bare hands and he almost got me; it was just an instinctive step-aside that prevented my capture – and at that moment I decided the story was getting too far. I rolled on the grass fast and, as soon as I stood on my feet again, I

raised my arms to perform another energy discharge.

“It's time we ended this duel, Trevor!” I shouted at him.

Another beam of astral energy attack struck Trevor's body; he collapsed on a stone slab, nearly unconscious.

“I've beaten you, Trevor”, I told him as I leaned over him, looking straight into his stunned eyes.

“I... I guess I can't fight you any more, Sandra... I can't fight something like this”, he admitted in a low voice.

* * * * *

After I had left Eldyla together with my captive, I was given the opportunity to meet another Trevor; this one was not a ruthless criminal but a frightened creature.

“What do you intend to do to me, Sandra?” he wanted to know, as soon as we were back in the mansion and I handcuffed him to his bed.

“I'm supposed to turn you over to the Intergalactic Police”, I replied.

“Do you have any idea what they will do to me?” he exclaimed in despair.

“I suppose you will be tried in court...”

“They will put me in a disintegration chamber! I have already been sentenced to death in 23 galaxies, you know!” he went on, in the same tone. “Do you really want this, Sandra?” he asked me finally, with a bitter smile.

“. . .”

“Please... I'm afraid to die like this! It isn't even instant, you know...”

“Let me think, Trevor” I replied, really concerned.

Indeed, I would hate to see that gorgeous body slowly disintegrate into atomic particles. On second thoughts, that

man hasn't done anything really evil, I reckoned. Besides, I didn't like that mission right from the start; in fact, I had accepted the job only out of curiosity...

“I guess we can make a deal, Trevor”, I said then.

“Name it!” he answered, his eyes sparkling with hope.

“I may as well abort the mission and notify my employers that I've failed in discovering your den in this galaxy; and you may go on robbing as many rich assholes as you like – frankly, I don't give a dime! But I want you to promise me that you will never cause any damage to innocent, ordinary people. If you ever break this promise, I will come and find you again. Am I clear enough?”

He nodded with a broad smile.

“There is something more”, I added in a softer tone.

“What?”

“You have to prove to me that you deserve to live!”

Though initially surprised, he bore no objection to that. So, I enjoyed the enemy's impeccable body to the fullest; in fact he was more than willing to satisfy every sexual demand of mine, and he proved to be a perfect love machine.

When it was all over, he lay in bed so adorably helpless, and he sank in deep sleep almost immediately. Unable to resist the temptation, I bent over him, caressed and kissed his strong thighs; then his tight abdomen, the well-built muscles of his chest, the muscular arms, the broad shoulders, the long, strong neck, finishing with a passionate kiss on his sensuous lips. *By the time he wakes up, I won't be here*, I thought in melancholy.

* * * * *

Just then I heard a bell ringing and I, Emma, was in the classroom again, still looking straight into Mark's eyes. He

looked back at me, in a kind of sweet bewilderment. The astral experience we had just shared had not lasted more than a couple of seconds in real time, but it was obvious to me he could hardly breathe because of the unprecedented excitement he had just felt.

At that moment, a strange rhyme echoed inside my head, recited by an inner voice that wasn't mine:

Reality destroys dreams,

dreams invade reality;

do not try to escape,

just give in to the Other Side...

Story Seven: Fright Night with the Enemy

originally handwritten
from 29th November to 7th January, 1993

I, Emma, felt quite stupid this morning: I accidentally took the wrong bus to school and had to stay in there a lot more than usual, before I reached my destination. However, my mistake soon proved to be good luck for it gave me the opportunity to meet George Dim. He came near, all smiles, and started talking to me with genuine interest: At first he was surprised to see me in this bus and asked me where I live. Then, we remembered some funny incidents at school and had some laughs. Later on, he said that he intended to become a computer programmer in the future. I told him I wished to become a writer; he smiled as he heard that. Then we spoke about music and rock stars, until we had to get off. I don't think I have felt happier in my whole life.

There was no way I could concentrate on any lesson that day; especially during Religion, I could hardly stifle my yawns, so I resorted to one of those fantasies I usually indulge in when I can no longer stand boredom. This time I was daydreaming of giving a recital of organ perfectionism for a big, delirious audience. I do play the organ in real life too, but I'm not that good and I know I will never be. In my fantasy there were thousands of people who were watching, listening and swaying to the rhythm. And, guess what, George Dim was there too, right in the first row, more attractive than ever, smiling to me continuously and enjoying my music to the fullest.

Yet, when the last notes and the cheers of the crowd faded away, I felt a kind of void inside me, an imperceptible yet radical change in the surrounding environment which I could not control, and this is when Emma receded to oblivion...

* * * * *

I, Sandra Anderson, had become famous almost overnight as an organ perfectionist in the ancestral city of Halmyra, capital of the planet Ed Tyrr. That night I was giving one more concert for an audience of thirty thousand people. I was really enjoying the unique experience, all those people adoring me like a goddess, however those concerts were just a cover-up. I was in Halmyra to prevent something very evil from happening, but at that time I didn't know yet what it could be exactly...

So, once again I kept on playing my music, smiling to all those who were engrossed in my performance, swaying to every note I played. At a moment, I left the organ to another member of my group, took his guitar, and played three of my most popular pieces as a guitarist; the audience was exhilarated. Certainly, there was no way I could make out Venor somewhere in the crowd, watching me with a stern face...

All of a sudden, something went wrong; the show was disrupted, there was no more music, nor lights. All the people just stood there motionless and silent, and we all watched the scene breathless: the place was instantly surrounded by odd, alien monsters descending from the night sky – weird, crimson creatures that slightly resembled water vortexes or gigantic spiderlike insects. After the initial shock, terror spread to the crowd of spectators, who sought to get out of the stadium in frenzy.

My group of musicians and I ran away through a stage door

and out in the fields, while thick drops of a weird liquid were now falling from the sky. *What's that? It looks like aliens spreading their spawn...* I supposed and my conscience froze, as I watched something else, even more dreadful, being formed in the starless sky right above the old cemetery in the distance: It was an eerie, white substance rising over the tombs and the cypress-trees, gradually forming something like a dinosaur's skeleton that glowed weirdly in the darkness of the night. *It won't be long till it comes to life*, I reckoned. Right then, I heard someone shouting "Come on, let's go!" and I was surprised at his cool temper. At that point I reached out for my laser gun, but a strong bump on my head made me sink into a very sinister vertigo...

* * * * *

I woke up stunned, and found out I was lying down on a hard bed somewhere, my arms and legs in chains. At first it was dusk, but soon the vertigo cleared up and I had to face my new reality: There was a big, ugly man standing by me, groaning with sadistic glee in his eyes; some others were behind him. A wide, round window on the opposite wall let an eerie, bluish light come into the room which was all made of metal. At a moment I noticed faint agitation in the blue outside the window, as a sparkling, frightening abyssal fish passed by.

I had no more doubts about where I was: Captive in an underwater base of the Dwellers of the Abyss -the most infamous gang of villains on the planet- down the depths of the Ed Tyrr Abyss. I shivered of terror, for the whole universe knows what they do to the women they capture. I shut my eyes in desperation for a few seconds. I wouldn't even dare imagine what was going to happen to me next.

Suddenly a door opened and the room was illuminated by

the haughty presence of somebody important who had just entered. As he approached, the others retreated at once, bowing their heads slightly, as a sign of respect. I wasn't really surprised when I saw it was Venor; in fact, it occurred to me all this had been plotted by him right from the start. I sighed in frustration as he leaned on his left arm in a casual manner, his palm on my right breast in feigned indifference, as if he were touching something lifeless, a door knob for example.

The prince of Yrkania gave an order and all the men withdrew at once. Then he fixed his eyes on me; he looked grim and furious at the same time. I felt helpless as never before, and I only wished I were already dead. At that point I lost my senses -again.

When I recovered, I faced a very hasty Venor who was already pulling me out of that room.

“What are you doing here?” I asked in a feeble voice.

“The Dwellers of the Abyss and I are old allies”, he replied.

“I know” I said, following him obediently.

Then he explained fast he had come to Halmyra so as to prevent the Dwellers of the Abyss from completing a certain magic rite that would bring havoc on the planet and beyond it; and saved me, by the way. For the time being, I didn't wish to know anything more...

We both walked away of that room very cautiously, lest we should be seen by anyone. At the present, I had no better alternative but to let Venor take me wherever he wished. We didn't get very far, though.

“This means our alliance is over!” I heard one of the Dwellers announce in a rough voice.

It was the big, ugly man who stood next to me in that cell. I

supposed he was the chief in that base. He must have already been waiting for us there, just round the corner, a whole ring of gangsters by him.

“Let me explain”, Venor started to say, but the chief didn't let him continue.

“It was our mutual agreement to perform the Great Rite here, on Ed Tyrr, according to our and your interests! The Queen and some of her minions were already materialized tonight!” the man went on in a sonorous voice.

I could hardly believe my ears! Those alien monsters I had seen coming down from the sky tonight...

“According to your words, the only serious obstacle would be Sandra Anderson. So, where are you taking her now?” asked the chief.

“I’m not taking her anywhere; I just need to find out what she knows exactly”, Venor answered but I don't think he convinced anyone.

Next moment the prince of Yrkania punched his ex ally hard on the chin and got rid of the others with some impressive high kicks. Then we ran away like crazy, although we both knew it was in vain – there was no way out of that underwater base for us. Very soon the prince had to use his laser gun to repel a group of Dwellers who were chasing us, but it was only a matter of time for us to get caught.

To my great surprise, the chief didn't order our immediate extermination.

“The Queen is already here”, he announced serious, while the others were listening taciturn. “Let those two be her first meal!”

* * * * *

So, once again I was captive of the Dwellers of the Abyss;

they led me into a sinister, undersea cavern, together with my worst enemy who, at that time, seemed to be my only friend. As soon as we were left in there, our captors withdrew at once with very quick and careful steps, as if they were afraid to stay even for one more second of time.

All was silent but we could just sense dreadful danger lurking in the air.

“It is not alone”, said Venor then, with a grim face. “Their "Queen" has thousands of offspring…”

“What have you done this time, Venor? And why?” I asked stern.

“I don't want to talk about it right now. Let's say this time my plans have gone terribly bad”, he replied with a bitter smile.

Unless I was tired and frightened, I would really enjoy the natural beauty of the underground place. As we walked on, hoping to find a way out before it was too late, the cave spread in endless tunnels and cavities, all lit with a mystical violet lighting that sparkled gently from the rocky walls, reflected into shallow pools and brooks. Venor seemed to be optimistic, insisting that such caverns always have an exit to the surface, while I was still complaining about his double game and the trouble it had already caused to both of us.

“What did you expect to achieve this time, Venor? Expand your dominion to other dimensions, maybe? That's not only greediness, it's foolishness as well!”

“Oh, give me a break! I am trying to set things right! Now, shut up and keep walking!”

We walked through narrow passages, occasionally wading along winding streams of water; we spent most of the time complaining and quarreling, even setting little traps to each other, until we reached an immense chamber with a lake in

the middle and no visible exit. Just then I realized all tunnels in that cave led precisely to that place. No way out...

“So, that's it!” I said. “A dead end! Now, the monster will appear and have us for dinner! All thanks to you!”

“I should have left you with all those creeps up there!” Venor burst out. “They would have finished you once and for all by now, and this is exactly what you deserve!”

I sought to slap him but he captured my hand in time and retaliated with a terrible blow that sent me half-fainted on a wet rock.

“You are going to pay for this, Venor”, I threatened though I was dizzy, my back still lying on the rock.

I stood up on guard, ready for another fight; he rushed at me outraged, his fists tightened.

“You need a good lesson, you ungrateful bitch!” he shouted.

I stepped aside at once and his fist punched the rock behind me really hard. He grimaced and let a cry of pain. I laughed amused, which made him even wilder. He ignored the pain and attacked again; I stepped aside once again, and he bumped slightly on a cliff. As he turned towards me, his blue eyes were flashing with anger.

I confronted his third assault with a fast, high kick that hit him hard on the face and made him lose balance, fall down on the wet ground and bump his head on a big boulder. He stayed motionless for a couple of moments – and I felt so guilty...

As soon as I approached, he tried to stand up but he fell prone again, leaning his head in his hands.

“If this is life, I don't want to live!” he uttered bitterly.

Next moment, I ran to him and helped him stand on his feet. He looked quite surprised at my unexpected affection and he

smiled in embarrassment.

“I... I won't kill you now”, he stammered awkwardly. “I wouldn't like to be all alone in here…”

My hands slipped spontaneously from his shoulders to his broad chest, and I couldn't help asking in a low, maybe sensual voice: “Why do you follow the Left Path, Venor?”

No sooner had I finished my question, than there was agitation in the water of the lake. We both stayed still, watching the swift but delicate movements of a slender creature that swam underwater, until it disappeared behind a block of prismatic cliffs.

We walked to its direction carefully; we saw it emerge by the stony lake shore, and we were taken aback at the sight: It was a charming creature, a young mermaid with long red hair and green eyes, sitting gracefully on a flat rock, smiling at us cordially.

“Take the path around the lake”, she advised us in a soft, melodious voice. “And watch out, monsters may appear any moment”.

“Who are you?” asked Venor but he received no answer.

The mermaid dove in the water again and she was out of sight in no time.

Although we found her behaviour rather enigmatic, Venor and I hurried to follow her advice, taking the jagged, slippery path that seemed to surround the lake. *How come we didn't notice it in the first place?* I wondered but passed it in silence.

The path proved to be a lot longer than we had initially supposed. It seemed to go on forever, through successive passageways or dangerous tracks along steep cliffs, upwards of downwards, right or left, finally leading us very far away

from the lake. We just kept on walking speechless, only hoping to find a way out – if there was a way out...

* * * * *

The end of the path proved to be the greatest surprise of all: coming out of a long, upward tunnel, we found ourselves inside an alien base pulsating with activity. It was built at the edge of the precipice over the Ed Tyrr Abyss, and consisted of numerous hive-like constructions, all made of a shining, smooth, marble-like substance. Venor and I stood there frozen, absorbed in the magnificent view of the starry night above the hives and their gruesome inhabitants, for a moment ignoring completely the fact that we had just fallen into a horrible death trap.

The place was full of alien monsters. Most of them looked like gigantic insects with very long and sharp teeth in their gaping mouths; their aggressive, screeching screams filled the sultry air. They had multiple, membranous wings that allowed them to fly freely, and long pointed tails with stings. I noticed some of them were different, as they had the form of gigantic spiders with tentacles; others looked like liquid vortexes -the kinds I had seen in Halmyra. Others were completely shapeless, made of a loathing, oozing substance that changed shape continuously, eventually becoming something that look like an insect, an animal, or even a human being. *Is it possible that the mermaid wanted us to end up here?* I wondered; just then I realized she were not a mermaid at all...

“They are shape shifters! They can take any form they like, even human form! They will mingle with the inhabitants and destroy them all, without their ever knowing about it!” I told Venor, keeping my voice as low as possible.

At that moment there was sudden silence all over the place, as our presence had been perceived. All the monsters turned

their ugly heads towards us, while a shapeless, still oozing creature had just crept near us. Within seconds, it took the form of the red-haired mermaid. She smiled at us in a most devious manner that revealed her true nature.

“You are here at last; fine, because my offspring are very hungry!” she announced in a sepulchral voice, a very evil expression altering her beautiful face.

Then she started changing again into something else, something that would soon be the most horrible of all those monsters.

At that point the prince of Yrkania pulled out his laser gun, but I just pushed him back with a slight movement of my hand, leaving him flabbergasted.

“Stay back, Venor!” I ordered him decisively, while more and more of those creatures were coming nearer and nearer.

Nevertheless, I was feeling ready to confront them all, as I could sense the *power* flowing inside me once again. I raised both my arms and launched two thick surges of energy against the approaching monsters, letting a loud cry at the limits of ecstasy, while Venor was only crouching behind me.

A few moments later, all monsters lay down in heaps of ashes or fried jelly that used to be their flesh. Nevertheless, their queen was still alive – at least for a few more seconds.

“You should do the same to the man who sold the planet and you, Sandra”, she uttered, having taken half the form of the mermaid again.

I shut my eyes in reverie, before it was too late and all the *power* was gone. I had to get out of there fast; I storngly wished I were in my spacecraft again, very far away from that planet, so I did my best to envisage this in every single detail.

Next instant, a powerful hum echoed deafening inside my head; the environment began to melt away and change rapidly before my eyes, as if in a mystical vision, but I knew it was a lot more than that.

When the vertigo was gone, I was in my spacecraft again. It was flying away from Ed Tyrr and its solar system, yet I still had the impression of huge sea waves swirling around the rising sun, an eerie cosmic vortex unfolding outside my window to the universe.

As about Venor, he was there too, standing by me; I can't really tell why, maybe deep inside I wished him to be with me – and he owed me lots, lots of explanations.

* * * * *

I am...

I am hovering in endless, white ether, aware of two primeval, opposing entities that rule the universe. They have the form of masculine gods and they represent "God and Satan", "good" and "evil", "heaven" and "hell". I can see them extending their arms, shooting thick energy beams from their open palms against each other.

"God" emits a light blue aura and produces a beam of the same colour, whereas "Satan" emits a red aura and produces a respective beam. The two surges of energy collide and melt together in the middle of the distance between them. Neither of the two entities seems to be the winner in that never ending fight.

As I am hovering to the right of "God", it occurs to me: *When the time of death comes and a soul leaves its mortal body, it "falls" in a certain position within the spectre formed by the two opposing beams. The better the soul, the nearer it gets to the light blue area ("heaven"); the worse the soul, the nearer it gets to the red area ("hell").*

Next moment I, Emma, wake up astonished, with the strong impression I have just had a revelatory astral experience...

Story Eight: Nowhere to Hide

originally handwritten
from 10th January to 17th February, 1993

Let me tell you this: There are times when I, the thirteen year old Emma Lloyd, can exceed the limits of my mortal body and travel out of it – wherever, whenever.

One of my recent sallies was to Stonehedge, the magical archaeological site which is a door to other worlds – but very few know that…

It was a wonderful, starlit night; the moonlight made the ancient stones glow mystically under the sparsely clouded sky. George Dim was waiting there for me; we made love all night through, right in the middle of the circle formed by the ancient rocks. The feeling was beyond words.

"This is fantastic, Emma", he said in a soft voice. "I think we could as well have a wonderful love affair on the material world of Earth, for a whole lifetime!"

"No, George", I replied sharply. "Don't even think about it again! Don't let yourself be deceived, there is nothing good there. Our love will be destroyed on the material world, in a thousand different ways, for this is what happens to anything good there! So, let's not allow this fate for our love!"

"I suppose you are right, Emma", he agreed with a sad mien.

"We can meet every now and then in the astral planes, live great experiences together, and relish our true, eternal love",

I went on in a low voice.

For a moment I closed my eyes in reverie and that was it: another dream, another astral dimension rushed in...

* * * * *

I, Sandra Anderson, was astonished to see Venor sitting casually at a table in the music pub I worked in during that period. The pub, the city, and the planet of Levania were quite far from the Yrkanian Dominion.

Just like every night, I sang and danced on the stage entertaining the patrons with Earth songs and dance styles, but that didn't certainly prevent me from staring at him from time to time. There was no doubt the prince of Yrkania was here to cause trouble, yet I couldn't help admiring his masculine beauty, enhanced by a sexy outfit: a tight-fitting blue and purple uniform that left the sides of his upper body naked; the high, purple boots made his appearance even more impressive. He was chatting with one of his officers, and they both looked rather tense.

“Don't fret now”, the officer advised Venor. “You cannot arrest her here; she's done nothing here”.

“It's time she did something”, replied Venor enigmatically. “Anyway, she must pay somehow for what she's done to my friend, Kael Darr. She tricked him and disappeared with a great part of his treasure, remember?”

“Kael Darr said she had been one of his concubines for two months, according to a special contract...”

“And at the lapse of these two months, she fled with most of his treasure instead of the two million units agreed! But enough talk!” exclaimed Venor and stood up.

I saw him and his officer coming towards me as I had just finished my last song; there was no way I could possibly

escape, so I preferred to show indifference.

Venor approached first and put his arms around my waist, as if we were lovers or something.

“What do you want this time, Venor?” I asked.

“A good friend of mine has lodged a serious complaint against you”, he answered, cupping my breasts for a moment.

Then his right hand was on my throat, and I felt a strange sting on my skin. I turned instantly and gave him a strong slap in the face, which made him fall back awkwardly on a table behind him. The man and the woman who were sitting at it didn't seem to be annoyed at all; on the contrary, they cheered up quite amused, and so did all the other patrons in the pub. I suppose that was the occasion Venor sought, for when he stood up again he looked angry and satisfied at the same time.

“You are going to come with us, Sandra”, he declared with a serious mien. “You are accused of cheating and robbing…”

“Kael Darr”, I finished his sentence.

Next moment both men attacked with the purpose of arresting me. I fought back with two swift martial art blows and, right when I thought I could feel the *power* inside me, something was very wrong: For some strange reason I could hardly move, my head was spinning and I felt too weak to act anyhow. I turned round slowly and faced Venor's hypnotic eyes. Both his hands were on my shoulders now, as my legs could no longer hold me. I was in no position to bear the slightest opposition.

“What... what have you done to me, Venor?” I stammered in despair, my heart pounding fast.

Taking into account that none of the security guards had

interfered so far, and that the whole pub had already been evacuated in almost no time, I assumed I had been betrayed. At that point I lost all my courage, as I suddenly understood the situation was even more serious than I thought. Tears came down my cheeks and I felt helpless as never before, in the hands of my worst enemy – as if Venor were somehow affecting my mind... *This is it!* I realized, surprised and terrified. *He is affecting my mind... but how?*

“How could you do such a thing?” Venor asked me then, with unexpected interest.

“Do what exactly?” I asked back bewildered.

“I mean... how could you become a contract concubine? I certainly couldn't imagine your being... your doing something like that!” said Venor, rather embarrassed.

“You wouldn't expect me to sell myself to that pig for a lousy two million units, would you?” I asked back, striving to regain my self-confidence.

“I would never expect you to become...”

“A whore, come on, say it”, I interrupted with a bitter smile. “Well, Venor, things are as simple as that: If a woman sells herself for a lot of money, she is a whore. If she does so for a little money, she is a respectable wife. If she doesn’t sell herself at all, she is not a woman at all! Am I right?” I explained cynically, which certainly didn't prevent my arrest.

* * * * *

I don't have much memory of the days that followed. I only remember well that Venor maintained his mind control over me, stifling inside me every serious thought of reaction. I had no idea how he did that, but he did it. I was obliged to take part in some Yrkanian missions, performing lesser tasks most of the time, while I had full knowledge of my

condition. Escape had become an obsession but I never tried to do anything like that; I felt as if invisible strings were attached to my body, controlling the slightest movement of mine.

After a while, I began suffering headaches. At first they were moderate, but they became stronger and stronger as the days of bondage went by; sometimes I even cried of pain. My captor soon found out about this, but he remained suspicious and indifferent.

One day the pain was so insupportable that I actually decided to escape, although my whole body was getting number and number at every such thought. Yet, I was determined to get away, no matter what...

In the beginning it seemed to be relatively easy, because nobody imagined I would be able to oppose Venor's mind control over me. Despite the unnatural numbness of my limbs, I fought a lot against numerous Yrkanian warriors, while I was still feeling as if my head was about to explode.

However, my plan wasn't meant to succeed; I was eventually captured by security guards and led before Venor. I was furious at him and everybody in there, feeling more desperate than ever.

“I will kill you!” I screamed outraged, looking straight into his eyes, the excruciating pain still drilling my head.

“What's the matter with her?” he only asked.

He took my face in his hands, showing a strange affection to me. Then I wept and shook, unable to utter one more word. *Maybe it is my fate to end my days as a mindless slave*, I thought, tears rolling down my cheeks.

“She has very strong headaches, as I've told you”, said a doctor, who had just arrived. “It is a subconscious reaction against imposed slavery. Her mind is opposing the continual

effect of the suppression implant, and this worsens her condition day by day".

Suppression implant? The words echoed like a thousand bells in my conscience.

"What have you done to me, Venor?" I asked.

"Listen to me, Sandra", he replied in a firm voice. "You have no other choice but compromise. Otherwise you..."

At that point the pain became insupportable and I lost my senses.

* * * * *

When I recovered, I found out I was in bed, inside my cell; Venor and the doctor were standing near me.

"You don't understand, prince Venor", I heard the doctor saying. "This woman just can't bear slavery; it is a rare case, but it happens. Her headaches will grow stronger and stronger and her brain will be seriously damaged, unless she is released..."

"This is out of the question!" protested Venor.

"If the implant stays inside her, she will only get worse and worse, until she dies!" concluded the doctor stern.

"Let her die, then!" announced Venor and walked out.

When I was finally alone, I shut my eyes and sank in apathy for a few moments. *That's it then*, I decided. *To slavery I choose death...*

Therefore, I just lay there motionless, with my eyes closed; I emptied all thoughts and sank deeper and deeper inside myself, until the pain was gone and so was everything else. After a while my heartbeat got slower and slower, until it stopped.

"She is dead!" a voice echoed all around, reaching from

very far away, as if from another world.

A familiar voice of a man called the name “Sandra”, again and again; it came to me as a strange resonance through dimensions. I knew I was Sandra but that didn't matter at all in that state of awareness. Then I felt a strong surge of energy streaming through my whole body, and I knew the *power* was with me once again, instantly releasing me from all kinds of bondage and pain.

For a fleeting moment in time, I managed to communicate with Peter of the Stars – and that was enough; then I opened my eyes again, making Venor step back startled. I smiled to him vaguely; I don't think he suspected I was already free...

* * * * *

“What do you think you are doing there, you scum?” asked Venor wrathful, his laser gun in hand, as soon as he found Peter in his private chamber. The intruder was examining closely a very special hologram that should be kept a secret.

“A holographic design of a planetary mind control tower to be installed as soon as possible on planet Levania... Does Sandra know about this?” asked Peter with a mocking mien, as if ignoring the danger he had just fallen into.

“Turn round with your hands up”, ordered Venor grimly.

“Sure!” said Peter and obeyed automatically.

As soon as he turned round, the enemy fired at once. The laser ray was well-aimed but Peter had already stepped aside, so that it only scratched the fabric of his green uniform on the left arm. Next moment he pounced on Venor like a wild cat; soon both men were on the floor, Venor's weapon slipping away from him. They fought hard with bare hands for a few minutes, both striving to get that gun, which had ended up under a heavy armchair.

As Venor was a lot stronger than his opponent, he soon managed to trap Peter with his back down on the floor. After some agonizing moments of vain efforts to get free, Peter got obviously tired, and he was nearly knocked out with a strong blow on the face. Right after, the prince of Yrkania stretched his left arm under the armchair quickly, grabbed his laser gun, sat up and pointed the barrel at Peter's chest, all fury.

“It's your time to die!” Venor's voice echoed threatening all over the room.

However, that didn't daunt Peter; though Venor had known him for years, he still failed to realize how supple his opponent could be. The prince barely had the time to see a very swift flying kick sweeping his weapon off his hand once again. He shouted in surprise and anger; then, he pounced on Peter at once, outraged.

At that point another round was about to begin, when I got in and interrupted it.

“All right, Venor, enough is enough! Stop it now!” I shouted.

Seeing me aiming at him with a stolen laser weapon, the prince stepped back immediately.

“Sandra! How... how could you...” he stammered astounded.

“Reach here? Simple! I killed all the guards!”

“He's got a new mind control tower and he intends to install it on this and other planets!” Peter explained impatiently.

“I see...” I replied thoughtful.

“Sandra”, said Venor then, strangely calm. “How far do you think you can go?”

“Very far!” I answered tauntingly. “Far enough to stop the whole project...”

Venor laughed and I got very angry.

“I can start by killing the brain of the project, and that's you!” I said and pointed my gun at him.

I am not sure whether Venor had taken my threat seriously, but right next moment he pushed Peter aside, rushed out of the room in a flash, and disappeared in a dark corridor, running fast like an arrow, dodging all my laser beams.

“How does he always escape you?” said Peter frowned.

“We must get out of here now!” I replied, lowering my weapon.

* * * * *

“Venor has put a mind control implant in me”, I explained later, as soon as the dimensional gate created by Peter closed behind us. “It must have happened during my arrest at the night pub; at a moment Venor touched my throat and I felt a sting...” I went on, as we found ourselves at a picturesque, rocky shore under a clouded sky, far away from Venor's base.

“At least he no longer controls you”, said Peter.

“The implant was destroyed during my transcendental meditation, as the *power* was with me again”, I made clear.

“You have only neutralized it temporarily”, he replied thoughtfully. “Unfortunately, such implants can't be destroyed; they can only be neutralized for a while. Now, put these on!” he said and handed me a couple of platinum bracelets with an impressive star pattern carved on them.

“What are they?” I wondered, putting them on at once.

“They will protect you from any kind of artificial mind control. I will explain more, later”.

According to Peter's further explanations, Venor had already

built a mind control tower somewhere near. This would cover the whole planet of Levania and its unsuspecting inhabitants, who would gradually yield to the Yrkanian tyranny without even realizing it.

We discovered the highest canopy of the tower among lofty rocks. It was surrounded by a cluster of odd-shaped antennae that looked like metal branches of some alien plant; or, it could as well be the work of some surrealist sculptor. The rest of the construction was underground.

After finishing our job there, we decided to keep lurking among the cliffs for a while, lest something might go wrong. The air was freezing cold, but we didn't have to wait for long: There he was, Venor walking along the narrow, stony path to the canopy. He was not alone. He was accompanied by one of those notorious women bodyguards of his; some of them were human, some were believed to be droids.

I had to prevent the prince of Yrkania from going into that tower, for we had sapped it and it would be reduced to ashes within minutes. However, I couldn't say directly that to Peter, who was smiling cunningly.

All of a sudden, the bodyguard stopped walking and looked around suspiciously.

“What's the matter?” asked Venor annoyed.

“I can feel something! A presence!” she announced stern and pulled out her laser gun, scouring the area with her experienced eyes.

Peter did not waste one more second in vain hiding. Before I could say or do anything, he stood up and made himself visible behind a rock, smiling courageously at his enemy.

“You again!” cried Venor and fired, just a split second after Peter had jumped down the cliffs, dodging the mortal laser beam just in time.

Both Yrkanians kept on firing at Peter, but he moved too fast for them, astounding them with his incredible suppleness and martial art techniques. With a sudden side kick he made the bodyguard lose her footing and fall into the lagoon below.

Venor was furious: “You are going to die, Peter!” he shouted and sought to fire once again.

However, he never had time to do so; a terrible explosion rent the air and both men fell prone on the stony ground at once, in an instinctive attempt to protect themselves. It all lasted a few minutes; when the air was finally clear enough, they both stood up cautiously.

“What the hell…!” uttered Venor bewildered.

He looked around perplexed, barely realizing that his new mind control base had just been reduced to ashes and dust. What he hadn't realized yet, was that his laser weapon was now in Peter's hands. The young man was smiling complacently as he was aiming at Venor.

It would all be over within a second, but Peter lowered the weapon and frowned, as I approached and gave him a stern, meaningful look.

“How... how did you...” stuttered the prince overwhelmed.

“It's not at all the first time I've sapped one of your bases”, Peter replied, even before Venor had finished his question.

“This is not over, you know”, Venor went on with fiery eyes. “This mind control tower will be rebuilt again in no time! You know that nothing can really stop the Interstellar Yrkanian Empire!”

For a moment I stayed silent; unfortunately, he was right about that.

“We can all leave now, in my spacecraft”, I announced then.

“This means, Venor, you are coming with us!”

“But why?” protested Peter, who had not seen that coming. “They aren't going to build anything here after their prince has disappeared”, I explained. “They will all be very busy looking for him for a while!”

“You... you won't get away with this! You just can't... you can't just take me with you!” stuttered Venor once again.

“Oh, yes we can”, I replied firm and he froze as both Peter and I were aiming at him with our laser weapons.

“And I don't want to hear any comments about women pilots...” I joked, which was the last straw for Venor.

“You really think your crate can escape the Yrkanian pursuit crafts, you bitch?” he exclaimed angrily.

“Let me tell you how my "crate" works”, I replied calm. “Two hyperchords pass instantly near each other; one moves towards my spacecraft as it takes off, while the other one moves away from it...”

“Shut up!” he burst and tried to hit me, but I parried his blow easily, smiling at him triumphantly.

Venor took a step back, leaned on a rock and brought his right hand on his forehead. Then he looked at me with sad eyes, acknowledging one more defeat...

* * * * *

“I feel much better and my mind is a lot clearer when I wear them”, I confessed to Peter later, after we had left Levania. “Besides, they look very attractive and precious too! They are platinum, right?” I wanted to know about the couple of bracelets he had gifted me.

“No, they aren't platinum, they are *alvesten;* it's a very rare metal found only on Eldyla. Its special molecular structure blocks all kinds of electromagnetic attacks and neutralizes

all negative implants, including the DNA-interwoven ones. I suggest you always wear them, especially when you are anywhere within the Yrkanian Empire".

"I know, Peter. I already have such an implant in my body..." I said gloomily.

"In all probability, you have more than one; you were a prisoner of war and a servant of the Empire once, right?"

Right...

"Remember, though, there is no full protection against such implants; if there was, they wouldn't have made them in the first place", Peter concluded with a serious mien.

"I understand, Peter, and... I don't know how to thank you!" I changed the subject and smiled broadly, trying to ease off the tension.

"We'll think of something", he replied in a soft voice.

Then, he sealed my lips with the most passionate kiss...

Story Nine: Parallels in Time

originally handwritten
from 21st February to 15th March, 1993

My good cousin Ann-Marie and her mother arrived from New Jersey last week and they paid us a visit this afternoon. I, Emma, was very happy to see them after so many months. Ann-Marie is one of the few persons I feel comfortable with, and we always have a nice time together. She, my sister Mary and I spent some time in my room, chatting and listening to music; then Mary suggested we go to the local park. We all agreed in unison.

No sooner had we arrived and sat on the swings, when a dozen of teenage boys rolled up, three of them on bikes, and surrounded us in a rather aggressive manner. It wasn't clear what they wanted exactly; they just kept glaring at us, shouting rigmaroles and guffawing like lunatics.

A few minutes later we left the park, rather exasperated. However, the gang of lunatics followed us along the road, and they went on jeering, wailing, and swearing at us continuously. At first I couldn't make out what they were saying, and I had the impression they were shouting at all three of us. Then I got a little more observant and realized they were cross with me. In fact, all of them were walking or riding by my side, and their insults were meant only for me! I didn't utter a word; neither did my sister or my cousin. The gang dogged us all the way home, with undiminished obstinacy. They disappeared only when my mother answered the door and we got into the house.

After that unfortunate incident, I could no longer enjoy the company of our visitors. All I wished was the night to come, so that I could sleep and dream...

* * * * *

I, Sandra Anderson, was riding my new motorbike along a Gonastian highway, relishing the sense of top speed, as I was already on my way to a new mission. The almost empty road seemed to converge abruptly before my eyes, but I kept on riding fast like the wind through the endless, deserted fields that spread alongside.

Gonast is one of the few planets in the known universe dominated by women -descendants of amazons, ancient tribes of women who managed to survive a terrible neutron war thousands of years ago- and it is one of the few places where I can feel "at home".

In a few minutes I was to meet Queen Nikita, ruler of this planet and a good friend of mine, and I could hardly contain my impatience.

Although Nikita was the queen of Gonast, she didn't look at all like majesty. She dressed herself with casual, light, colourful clothes and her manners were polite and friendly with everybody. The only thing that showed her status was a diadem of ruby stars on her blond hair and a thick, gold bracelet around her left wrist.

Nevinral was one of the most handsome men I had ever seen and he did look a lot like Peter of the Stars. He was red-hair with green eyes too, as well as slender, dynamic and fascinating like my man. Nevinral used to be one of the queen's private warriors, until he became her mate. However that didn't change much about his social position as a man on Gonast, which was indicated by a platinum chain around his waist.

The homonymous capital of Gonast had been facing grave problems recently, as Nikita explained to me in brief: “There is a kind of invasion taking place every night, all over the city, and we still don't know who is behind this. There are conflicts of course; people get killed, men disappear, more and more day after day...”

“Haven't you managed to ward off the enemies yet? I'm surprised!” I admitted.

“I am, too! Those raiders are more than worthy opponents! We haven't even captured one of them yet!”

“Really? That's remarkable”, I said thoughtful.

“But we suspect it is our ancestral treasure they want!”

“Nobody would dare touch that treasure!” I objected.

“It’s a miles-long vein of radioactive gold, under the Old Necropolis; very dangerous but invaluable for specific scientific applications. Yet, somebody dares”, insisted Nikita.

Next evening I witnessed one of those mysterious, predatory raids. Alien, motorbike-like vehicles appeared all of a sudden and rushed into the city. Wild, ironclad bandits invaded houses and other buildings, stealing whatever seemed to be of some value, murdering those who tried to bear any opposition, and abducting others, mostly young men. There were fierce battles between the raiders and the warriors of Gonast and many of them were killed, whereas the enemies seemed to be invulnerable to laser weapons.

When it was decided they had taken enough, all raiders got on their impressive vehicles and disappeared into the night, having followed a strategic plan of extreme accuracy. It wasn't long before they were all riding fast, away from the inhabited area, into the barren plateau, where the Old Necropolis was situated.

Nevinral believed the enemies had a kind of hidden base somewhere there, and I agreed to help him locate it. So, he and I decided to follow the raiders, although we knew it would be very difficult to keep a safe distance without losing them or been seen.

* * * * *

The jagged, rocky formations that spread all over the plateau -remains of a primeval meteor rain- offered us some cover during the journey, as we were following the tracks of the inimical vehicles on the ground. Suddenly, though, there were no more of them; we almost reached the area of the Old Necropolis.

I shivered as we got off our motorbikes, and it was not due only to the cold. For a couple of seconds I observed Nevinral's attractive body as he was gazing beyond the petrified dunes, to the chain of steep hills that rose ominously to the night sky, hiding the Old Necropolis behind them.

We climbed up the golden cliffs, until we could make out the main gate of the Old Necropolis in the distance. The starlit night and the three full moons of Gonast offered a unique view of the site. The metal door was ajar, standing between two bulky pillars built of heavy, parallelepiped stones that formed a pointed arch above the gate.

Coming down the steep hill, we made our way through jagged rocks and dark bushes, till we finally stood in front of the main gate, now emerging incredibly high before us. It cracked a little as we stepped in; it gave me the impression we were entering another reality. My heart was pounding hard in my chest and strong chills made me freeze, as we walked in with laser guns in hands. Not a sound was heard but the gusts of the wind that blew among ruined walls, ancient tombs and gloomy, half-dead trees.

We approached the nearest edifice very carefully; we pushed the rusty door open and walked in, all our senses on the alert. It looked very much like an old-fashioned house: it was fully furnished, with all the necessary household items, and it was still intact, just as it had been at its prime, many centuries ago. We found five skeletons in different rooms, standing like fossilized in various positions – an ordinary family of elsewhen, dealing with everyday occupations, before time had stood still.

Clouds of dust came in and out of the rooms from broken windows and gaping doors, without ever settling anywhere. That made me feel rather perplexed, as I could sense a kind of agitation in the air and I didn't even try to figure out why.

We rushed in and out many such buildings, both of us overwhelmed by an increasing mental pain, having nearly forgotten the original reason of this unholy visit. The Old Necropolis was a city actually, an ancient city once destroyed in a neutron war, now abandoned for millennia.

We moved around mechanically for an indefinite amount of time, until we found ourselves in front of an outdoor staircase of a mansion. There were lots of such luxurious buildings all around, one more impressive than the other; apparently, that used to be the posh part of the once thriving city. Even the yards, as well as the streets, were still intact, sterile, haunted by ancient lives that were terminated all at once, without their even knowing why.

Suddenly I felt like running away from that place at once and never coming back, yet a pleasant numbness prevented me from doing so. *Here,* I pondered, *you stay either for a little while or for ever...*

* * * * *

Next moment a sharp, repetitive noise of fast approaching

steps broke the silence. Nevinral and I hid behind a marble wall with our guns in hand; very soon we saw somebody arrive. The intruder looked like a man; he was heavily armed and all clad in a kind of metal panoply. His face was abnormally cool, entirely inexpressive. It was obvious that was no man at all.

The best way to confront a cyborg is to flee, for such structures are practically indestructible. I touched Nevinral's shoulder to allude we should get away at once, but he paid no heed. He just rushed forward determined to fight the metal enemy, and I only shouted his name in vain. All I could do next was contact Nikita through my bracelet telecommunication device.

The enemy took a step forward and ordered us to surrender. He looked like a good-looking, muscular man and he had a powerful firearm in his hands. For a moment I froze, partly hidden behind a well preserved brick wall; Nevinral defied the danger and dashed at the cyborg, probably intending to disarm him somehow. I wondered at his courage – Goddess, he really was so much like my Peter of the Stars!

The cyborg fired immediately and Nevinral jumped up with incredible suppleness, while I was only watching, still hidden behind the brick wall. I left my cover cautiously and followed the two opponents from a distance. The droid moved on, firing again and again, forcing Nevinral to retreat steadily. The young man dodged the multiple laser beams by stepping aside just in time, rolling fast on the wet ground, performing successive aerial or ground somersaults I envied.

Soon both opponents were standing outside an impressive palace, which was in astoundingly good condition. At that time Nevinral looked very serious, still trying hard to dodge all those laser beams; he had probably acknowledged by

now that it would be impossible to counterattack a robotic warrior whose movements were as quick and accurate as only a robot could achieve. Nevertheless, he kept escaping death every moment undaunted, methodically taking off the cyborg away from me. I just stared at him for a couple of seconds, admiring his unique courage, his fighting spirit, his devotion, as well as his impeccable body.

Suddenly, I felt as if I were waking up from deep sleep; I had to help Nevinral get out of this alive, and I had to act right now. I pulled out my laser weapon and fired at the cyborg at once. As expected, a simple laser beam did almost nothing to the machine – just a small scratch on its back. Nevertheless, the droid's attention was finally diverted from Nevinral; the metal warrior turned round and looked at me with its glassy eyes. I repeated the laser blast, but it hardly made him step back. Nevinral had knelt one leg on the ground, obviously exhausted; I ran to take cover behind a half-ruined marble wall, although I knew it was in vain.

All of a sudden, a huge flashing light blinded me, and next moment the droid burst to exploding pieces. I turned round to see who had done this, and I faced Limara, the chief amazon warrior, carrying an impressive portable bomber in her hands. The red-haired, extremely muscular woman stood tall and haughty opposite the ancient palace, looking at me stern.

Just then I noticed that the luxurious edifice, surrounded by tall, leafy trees and bushes, looked strangely transparent. After the initial surprise, I figured out it was not a real thing; it was a vibrating vision from the distant past, revealed through a time gap created by the neutron blast itself. It did not last long; it vanished like an illusory apparition, giving its place to decayed ruins, cold gusts of wind moaning through its broken windows. Lots of such holographic scenes appear from time to time within the Old Necropolis,

bringing the past into the present just for a few seconds or minutes…

“Are you alone?” I asked the amazon warrior.

“I am more than enough!” Limara replied arrogantly.

Next moment abrupt rustling noises filled the air and the whole place seemed to abound in cyborgs, appearing from all directions. Limara used her weapon to destroy some of them in almost no time, yet the enemies were too many; it would only be a matter of seconds...

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Just when I thought everything was lost, they were suddenly everywhere, lurking behind ajar doors, half-ruined walls, bushes or tree trunks, more and more of them moment by moment – Gonast amazon warriors, armed with portable bombers or heavy laser weapons, shooting like a wave of fire at the enemies who, at this isolated place, could do practically nothing to defend themselves effectively.

The battle was rather violent, and it seemed to be going on for ever, although it actually didn't last more than ten minutes. Both sides suffered casualties, but finally the amazons prevailed. The remaining enemies preferred to give in, an action impossible for a cyborg – but those proved to be men, flesh and blood, and this brought some exhilaration among the women warriors.

Only one of the soldiers moved aside, refusing to follow the preordained fate of his comrades.

“Come out and fight fairly, queen Nikita, if you have the guts!” he shouted and brandished a luminous laser blade in his right hand.

A stony silence reigned all over the place, as the man's unheard-of insolence and bravery astonished everybody. His

well-trained body and his attractive face with the hazel hair were finely outlined in the moonlight. He was awfully young, and it was obvious that Nikita knew him.

Nevinral took out a laser gun and stepped forward with the intention of fighting for his queen, but Nikita stopped him with her hand on his left shoulder.

“I should have known it was you right from the start, Malev!” she uttered sharply and got ready to confront him, armed with a similar weapon.

Time seemed to stand still, as the two rivals kept exchanging swift, skillful, mortal blows outside the ruined palace. She was cool-tempered and circumspect, he was fast and determined to win or die. The duel went on equivocal for several minutes of suspense, until the young man was finally tricked by a false misstep of the queen; he dashed forth to finish her but next moment Nikita disarmed him with an unforeseen side kick. Then she sprang up and pounced on him furious with her bare hands. Yet, he reacted with remarkable readiness, avoiding all her blows with supple, accurate movements.

Soon he was forced to step all the way back into the yard of an ancient temple, always seeking a chance to get the edge again. However, she was too experienced as a fighter to let something like that happen, and he was too tired to make that happen. After a wild assault, she managed to immobilize him under her strong, muscular body, on the mossy slabs of the temple yard. Malev was stunned and breathless, yet he still refused to surrender, vainly trying to free himself for some more agonizing seconds. Then he gave up, closed his eyes and waited…

Soon Malev was lying on a bulky altar inside the ancient temple, his arms and legs in chains, while Nikita was pointing a sharp knife at his throat. In his big, black eyes I

could see the fear of dying glowing in the twilight.

“Come on, Nikita! Finish me now!” he cried, trying hard to put on a face of defiance.

“I will decide if and when, Malev!” she objected. “Just tell me, why did you cause all this, what did you expect to achieve?”

“I wished to cause the downfall of Gonast and its amazons”, he confessed with a pale face. “I just don't like women ruling the planet!”

“Men had their chance; and they lost it centuries ago!” said Nikita stern.

“I... I don't want to live like...” gasped Malev then.

“A sex slave”, Nikita was beforehand in completing his sentence. “This is what we do to the men we capture in battle. It is a primeval tradition, not to be altered now”.

She touched his fair skin smoothly on the chest, first with the edge of her knife, then with her fingers. His well-shaped body, sensually outlined under the tight-fitting blue uniform, shivered for a second. A long kiss on his lips defined his fate as a prisoner of war on an amazon planet. At that point I noticed Nevinral lower his head and look the other way.

As he explained to me later, Nevinral felt rather embarrassed every time men ended up as prisoners of war on Gonast. He confided in me that would have been his fate too, unless he had been lucky enough to be distinguished by the queen and appointed as one of her personal bodyguards. He was a revolutionary once too, just like Malev, and he remembered the time of his capture, moment by moment, as he was trying to set free some other soldiers. Queen Nikita had arrived just in time to prevent his sexual abuse by a number of amazon warriors. Soon he became her mate and he has lived happily with the queen ever since, although he

hasn't completely settled all this inner conflicts...

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To cut a long story short:

A few months ago, Malev and some other men decided they couldn't stand the regime of Gonast any longer, so they escaped and fled to the Old Necropolis. The place is considered sacred, therefore nobody pursued them there; they were just expected to reappear in time.

However, it wasn't long before the fugitives accidentally discovered an immense, underground, secret vault, which proved to be an ancestral arsenal. The cyborgs, as well as various weapons, utensils and computers had been kept there since ancient times, before even the outbreak of the neutron war. While exploring the galleries leading to the arsenal, they also discovered the vein of radioactive gold; they used it to activate the cyborgs, as well as the computers, weapons and other stuff they found in there. Then, they decided to use those weapons and the army of droids to overthrow the amazons' regime in Gonast.

More and more men joined this army of rebels every time the cyborgs raided the capital - that's why only men disappeared during those raids. But this is over now and all of them will be punished the right way. As about the remaining, inactivated droids, they will be programmed to serve Gonast as elite warriors from now on.

Then it was time we had the men prisoners for our satisfaction. Most of them accepted their fate with a certain complacence. One of the few who protested was Malev, and he looked rather preoccupied when he was given to Limara. He even sought to escape her, but soon he was caught again. He was tied with chains and ravished by that feared amazon from dusk till dawn; it ended only when he was completely

exhausted, tamed body and soul, yet asking for more.

I was offered an exceptionally attractive, blond guy with shiny blue eyes and a brawny body. He seemed not to be bothered by the leather collar with the silver chain around his neck, and he was more than willing to do or suffer whatever I pleased. I was intoxicated by the sense of having a sex slave at my disposal. I left him breathless after sunrise, when we were both satisfied as never before.

* * * * *

In my dream, the figure of my sensual lover was altered little by little, until he was no longer naked, nor sexy. The leather collar with the silver chain was gone, and he was now wearing old-time, luxurious garments. He still looked handsome, yet he was no longer the same person; he was gradually turning into someone else, a medieval prince maybe.

The incredible astral experience I had just had was already degenerating into a simple dream until I, Emma, woke up with a start. My wonderful astral adventure had now become a vague, fugitive memory in my mind; nevertheless, I was feeling energized, blissful, and disappointed for being here once again…

Story Ten: Theft of a Myth

originally handwritten
from 20th March to 19th April, 1993

This evening my sweet little sister Mary got on my nerves because she demanded I, Emma, should give her exactly half of the photos of singers and cinema stars I have clipped out of magazines and keep in a special album. She wanted them here and now, she grumbled and grumbled, until I lost my temper and gave her a clout. She turned on the waterworks at once, mum ran to see what was wrong and Mary moaned that I hit her bad.

"...and I have a terrible headache now!" she complained -the usual performance.

Mum glared at me, she ordered me to give half of my photos to Mary, I refused, and my sister resorted to her strongest argument: "If you don't beat her up, I will vomit!" and she started the act right away.

As expected, mum got furious at me: "You, big one, give those photos to the kid!" she groaned, while Mary was whining with crocodile tears: "Aaaaaah, my head!"

Then mum pounced on me, shouting: "What did you do to the poor kid, you big one, you gawk!"

In order to avoid more drama, like the previous time when mum pushed me down on the floor and started kicking and beating me, I opened the door and ran away from home. I was absent for a couple of hours; when I came back mum didn't dare utter a word -ha!

Yet, my sister was undaunted: “You will pay for this, Emma! Just wait and see!”

“Mind your own business, you hen!” I told her in a low, suppressed voice, so that mum wouldn't listen. “What can you possibly know? You've always had whatever you wished, because you are such a mincing little slut, while I...” I paused, staring at her bewildered eyes.

“I have to sleep”, I said finally. “And dream!”

* * * * *

Sandra Anderson... I feel constrained to repeat my name in my mind over and over again, while I am here on planet Phaon. It is a wild and primitive world, most of it covered by endless ochre deserts studded with petrified dunes, bleak villages and small cities built in the sparse oases. Thousands of people are crowded there, living lives of misery and perpetual fear, their heads constantly bent before the Yrkanian dominion, which is alleged to be of divine origin.

The arenas are the most popular form of entertainment in the cities of Phaon, where the masses have the opportunity to exhaust their oppressed aggression by watching star gladiators fighting each other to death or being torn apart by gigantic alien beasts. It all happens for the amusement of the roaring crowd and, eventually, for the glory of the winner in a supposed sacred tournament.

I would have never come to Phaon, or become a gladiator, unless for a very good reason. According to the information I had gathered after lots of research, somewhere here, in the capital city of Thanda, there was a valuable relic of an ancient civilization lost and forgotten long ago. At that time, I couldn’t be sure about what it was exactly, but I definitely wanted it for myself and my interstellar travels.

First I changed my appearance in such a way that not even

my own mother would recognize me; then I introduced myself as an experienced gladiator coming from "beyond the deserts". That explanation was not satisfactory enough for the Reverent Judges, who claimed there is nothing beyond the deserts. However, my identification papers looked perfectly genuine to them. Last but not least, gladiators are always welcome to the arenas of Phaon, especially once they have succeeded in a certain fight-test.

Three weeks after my arrival, I had already won a very good reputation as a gladiator. That new career of mine had already cost a dozen of slaughtered opponents, but it all served a good purpose...

* * * * *

So, there I was once again, wreathed in the dust of the arena, waiting for my rival to appear and the final duel to begin. I could hear the crowd buzz in excitement, countless inquisitive eyes fixed on me. I was wearing a violet, tight-fitting uniform, embedded with variegated shining gems around the waist. My left hand was tightened to an invaluable *Simisen* sword. My long hair was dyed dark blue, which is considered the colour of wisdom on Phaon.

I could hardly contain my impatience when my opponent finally entered the arena. The spectators burst into cheers of exhilaration for he, the renowned Zygor Amherst, was not any gladiator; he was the champion of Phaon for five consecutive years, and he was their strongest hope to see an arrogant warrior woman -that is me- defeated and dying on the sand of the arena.

Looking quite impressive and strong in his tight blue uniform made of some metalized material, Zygor approached slowly, armed with a steel dagger and a round shield. He had a set face with an air of determination, curly black hair and dark blue glasses concealing his eyes. As he

said, only the gladiator who would beat him in the arena would get the right to look straight into his eyes. I found that kinda eccentric, and I could hardly wait to do so - but... *Was I supposed to kill that man?*

A dagger can be a very dangerous weapon in skillful hands, and Zygor Amherst soon proved to be more than that: he was extremely agile and fought with a vehemence I could hardly repel. He was constantly on the attack, very confident of himself, forcing me to retreat most of the time. I could hear the crowd roar, impatiently awaiting my fall; especially the women were yelling continuously, in ecstatic mania, while a strong sense of aversion was slithering all over me. I knew I wouldn't be able to resist that kind of concentrated negativity much longer…

For the time being, all I could do was recede all the way back, barely parrying a cascade of terrible blows, unable to fight back. Very soon I ended up in a corner breathless, and the sword was suddenly too heavy for me; after a swift blow of Amherst, it was no longer in my hand. I could only stare at the enemy stunned, as he was raising his shiny dagger to deliver the ultimate blow. I definitely wished to feel the *power* there and then, but it wasn't with me at that time, and I felt so desperate – only for a very long moment.

Then I span round into a fast high kick, which disarmed Zygor's hand and sent the dagger fly away through the dusty air, while I was rolling down on the sand towards my fallen sword; I grabbed it fast and stood up to my feet in a split second. The enemy stared at me in utter surprise, still unarmed. His self-confidence had obviously waned, as he instantly glanced back in anguish -a fatal mistake for any gladiator- possibly looking for his dagger, which was nowhere to see.

There was stony silence among the spectators now, as the

red sun Zenobe was setting behind the ancient pyramids that rose up to the violet sky, beyond the upper tiers of the arena. All at once, I was abashed at the tension on Zygor's face, as he stood there fully alert, determined to fight with bare hands. My personal principles urged me to lay my weapon down on the sand and continue with a fair fight. The crowd burst into wild acclamations.

Charging with a loud martial cry, Amherst rushed at me in a frantic attempt to knock me down with his powerful fists. I managed to deflect a terrible punch with a quick blocking movement and then sent him fall back with a sharp sidekick. In no time he was up on his feet again, launching another assault. I ducked immediately and rolled on the ground away from his outraged blows, amidst whirls of gray sand.

All at once, a strong kick made my head spin and I collapsed; the crowd roared in excitement. I hadn't lost my senses yet, but I no longer knew where I was or what I was doing; I was only vaguely aware of imminent danger. Instinct alone saved my life as, right at the last moment, I came to myself and swept the opponent down with a low kick. He certainly hadn't expected that, for he finally lost balance and fell on the sand. I pounced on him with a loud martial cry and brought the fight to an end with a sharp blow between his eyes. Zygor Amherst sank to the ground unconscious.

For a few moments I stayed there motionless, pondering on how lucky I was that time; not only had I survived a very dangerous opponent, but I had also avoided one more meaningless killing. The buzz of the displeased crowd irritated me, but I didn't really care. My attention was fixed on the fallen enemy, whose eyes were still a mystery.

I approached cautiously and, after a short hesitation, I knelt beside him and took the dark glasses off him. Next minute

he opened his eyes -sparkling, emerald, mesmerizing eyes- and stared at me in strange calmness. For a couple of seconds I was numb at his rare beauty; then I helped him stand up and embraced him spontaneously, while the crowd was watching breathless and silent. I considered this an ideal ending to my career as a gladiator, which also brought me one step closer to my original purpose.

* * * * *

I could barely contain my suspense, as six acolytes were guiding me to the Great Hall of Honour. This is where the king of Phaon himself awards champion gladiators – a sanctum accessible only to those who deserve it. When we reached the black metal portal, known as The Last Gate, I was astounded to see the clerics knew how to type the secret digital code which allowed entrance to the vast chamber. When the portal was open at last, I saw the king sunk in his carved ebony throne, obscured in his dark-coloured royal garments. The grimness on his face showed he did not like at all the fact that he had to reward a female gladiator; yet, he couldn't do otherwise now.

As I stepped in, my heart leaped with wonder. The dark walls were hidden behind a complex of heterogeneous pieces of machinery: odd-shaped outgrowths; giant glassy spools matching each other in paradox manners; sharp-edged levers jutting out in hinted aggression; numerous hexagonal hive-like cavities beaming inside with a soft light; interspersed gemstones of various shapes and colours shed a soft, uncanny light in the whole room. Most of the pieces were covered with a protective network made of some membranous tissue. The ceiling consisted of big metal slabs, carved with relief representations of dreadful aliens. But what impressed me most, were the space navigation systems with the vast polyhedral screens and the weird-shaped furnishings, all symmetrically placed around the

king's throne.

It all proved to be true then, all what I had found out during my research in forgotten archives of secret libraries: The Great Hall of Honour, its origin unknown to its present residents, was in fact the legendary starship *Zephyrus:* A work of extraordinary science and incredibly old age, a myth for many civilizations, had been resting there, on that insignificant planet, for millennia. Certainly, the primitive people of Phaon could have never imagined what it really was; to them, it had always been a god-sent temple of kings.

* * * * *

It proved to be rather difficult for me to overcome certain nervousness that night, until I finally managed to calm down and go to sleep for I had to dream...

Before long I gained awareness of myself and the dream became lucid. I explored the astral fields for a few moments; then I forced myself to awake instantly, only to sink to the hypnagogic state again, simultaneously envisaging the expressive face of Peter of the Stars. The image of him grew clearer and clearer in my conscience; his shiny red hair waved in the soft breeze, his slit green eyes sparkled in the light of dawn.

The haze gradually melted away and I was elsewhere now, watching Lord Kochon, the infamous space vagabond, who was climbing on the purple cliffs that rise above the dark waters of the Nameless Lagoon. He looked impressive in his black uniform with the metal epaulets and the heavy firearm in his hands.

“All right, Peter, give me back the Jade Sceptre and I shall spare your life! Maybe!” he bellowed harshly.

“Why don't you come and get it?” echoed Peter's daring voice behind a high rock.

“You will regret this!” cried the enemy full of wrath, as he climbed higher on the steep rocks, scanning the coast with his narrow, cunning eyes.

All of a sudden, a scarlet laser beam hissed down the mossy crags and hit the stone just an inch away from the Lord's head, leaving him breathless for an instant. Right after, I heard Lord Kochon command his mercenaries with a rough voice: “Get him now, dead or alive! Move, you morons!”

I hid behind a shell-shaped rock and watched Peter fighting six of his enemies. I had no doubt he would prevail once again against Kochon's sluggish warriors, thanks to his determination and his excellent martial art skills. I didn't have to wait long: Just a few seconds later, he had managed to kick them all off the crags.

However, Lord Kochon -undoubtedly more efficient than his ruffians- kept on climbing up the cliffs, always full of anger. In the meantime, Peter had taken cover behind a massive arched rock. Just then I realized he was completely unarmed. *He must have lost his laser weapon during the fight*, I thought, feeling a clasp on my heart.

As soon as the enemy came near enough, the ruler of Eldyla pounced on him at once, defying the deadly firearm in Kochon's hands. He barely dodged a thick luminous beam that shattered the purple rock behind him into burning dust. Next moment, a set of impressive kicks made Lord Kochon lose his balance, stumble back and fall off the cliffs. The heavy weapon slipped off his hands, and a loud scream echoed all around. A soft thud was heard and Peter rushed down the precipice in search of the Lord's body; yet he found nothing. An ominous silence reigned all over the coast.

Suddenly, a dark shadow sprang out of an oblong gap among the rocks and assaulted Peter like a crazed beast. It

was Kochon attacking barehanded; he managed to take his rival by surprise, throw him down by the edge of a flat rock and grab him by the throat, in a furious attempt to straggle him. After a few agonizing moments, Peter finally got rid of the deadly grip and pushed the enemy off with his strong legs.

Lord Kochon cried of pain as he crashed upon jagged crags; yet, next moment he was back on his feet again, ready to continue the duel. I watched the rest of the fight in anguish, until Peter got impatient and sent the vagabond meet his men into the cold waters of the Nameless Lagoon, with a set of impressive high kicks. I left my hiding place and ran to him for a long kiss of love.

Time to return: I forced awakening at once, all my attention focused on Peter's enchanting face and the warmness of his hand in mine. Almost immediately, I woke up in my quarters in Phaon with a burning mind. Peter of the Stars was with me now, his slender figure finely outlined in the moonlight that came through the latticed window.

“Does Venor know anything about this?” he asked thoughtful, after I had explained everything.

“Venor? Of course not, how did this occur to you?”

“I don't know; but he's been after you forever!”

“He's been after you, too”, I reminded him.

* * * * *

We wound our way through the endless dark corridors like fleeting shadows, perceived by guards only when it was too late for them. We had just disposed of the last ones, when we finally stood in front of the Last Gate. My heart sank in uncertainty, as I typed the digital code upon the odd flower-shaped keyboard which was embedded in the centre of the portal. I only hoped I had memorized it correctly when the

acolytes had brought me here in the evening.

Entering the bridge of the legendary starship *Zephyrus* at last, for a few moments we stood still, hardly believing we had just achieved our purpose.

“Do you really know how to navigate this? I wouldn't be so sure if it still functions”, said Peter in a broken voice, actually spoiling the magic of the moment.

“We shall see”, I replied, trying to sound as certain as possible.

I had studied a lot about the navigation of the *Zephyrus* in many different old books, though I often had the impression some parts were missing. Anyway, I thought I knew how to put an end to its agelong, apparent death and pilot it back to the vast lacunae of outer space, where it once belonged.

With hesitant steps, we walked to the navigation panel which was made of a light green, iridescent material.

“Peter, give me the Jade Sceptre,” I said softly.

He took the stolen item out of its sheath and handed it to me. All I had to do now, was place it in the respective cavity and wait for a few agonizing seconds. To my great excitement, it gradually turned transparent and luminous, shedding a soft white light all around. I sighed in relief, for the first step had been successful: It is the Jade Sceptre that provides the *Zephyrus* with neutrino-naser energy, and that's why I had assigned Peter to steal it from Lord Kochon in the first place.

After that, I felt a lot more confident: I lowered the correct levers, pressed dozens of keys, gave mental and manual orders to the Artificial Intelligence Unit and finally stayed still, full of suspense. Innumerable lights flashed one after another, the weird-shaped screens lit up. A vibrating whirr filled the air, as incredible quantities of energy were

streaming into the powerful engines, bringing the ancient starship back to life.

Like a giant night butterfly, with its sinister wings glittering in the starlit sky, breath-taking and dreadful, the *Zephyrus* took off at last, after eons of idleness. It slowly started to ascend into the night sky of Phaon, reducing to burning dust a large part of the miserable city below. Soon we were flying in space, the red star Zenobe pulsating outside our window.

For an indefinable span of time, all sense of reality seemed lost for both of us. There was only our everlasting passion, as we crossed vast intergalactic distances towards a final destination: A small, semi-material asteroid known as Eldyla, in the centre of the constellation of Argo – Peter's home and kingdom.

* * * * *

What we should have foreseen but unconsciously chose not to: Someone had been after us during all that time, probably taking into account the information given to him by spies on planet Phaon. Well, it has always been impossible for me to hide from him for long...

As soon as the enemy's spacecraft appeared in our radars all at once, we both froze in astonishment.

“I don't believe it! An Yrkanian spacecraft!” I exclaimed.

“Venor's spacecraft!” gasped Peter.

“It has just completed a space warp!” I added.

“What is he doing here?”

“I have no idea” I replied, “but this time he will get an unforgettable lesson!”

Confident of our military superiority, I set the *Zephyrus* on a

war footing. *Yet, I don't know*, I thought. *You just don't shoot sparrows with cannons...*

Well, this time the "sparrow" attacked first; that made me worry, though logically I shouldn't have: Just as I had expected, Venor's reinforced lasers proved to be totally ineffective against the protective shield of the *Zephyrus*.

Next moment, I felt a strange vibration in the air and I quivered. "I don't like this," I muttered. Then I focused my attention on the main screen, where the most dangerous weapon in the known universe had just appeared, slowly unfolding itself to the form of a gigantic spectral cobweb: An abominable horror, a living organism known as the *Lethe*, practically indestructible and everlasting, feeding on all kinds of energy – nothing less than a cosmic vampire, controllable only by its master, the prince Venor of Yrkania.

"What are you waiting for? Destroy him now that you still can!" cried Peter.

"Too late, Peter!" I said breathless.

Although I inwardly knew it would be pointless, I attacked repeatedly with reinforced lasers, which Venor dodged easily. In the meantime, the *Lethe* was growing bigger and bigger, unfolding its countless horrible tentacles faster and faster, imposing its dominant presence in the starlit vacuum of space.

I sought to launch neutrino-naser shells against it but it was in vain; there was not enough energy left for that. I fired nuclear bombs at it, then an antimatter shell, but they all proved to be like sugar cubes to the hovering monster, which was already reaching its full size – no smaller than a lesser planet.

Very soon all gauges showed low levels, which meant the cosmic vampire had already started to absorb energy from

the *Zephyrus*. A few seconds later, the whole spaceship shook vehemently because of Venor's next attack. Peter hastened to fire the lasers again and again, before I had the time to say or do anything. Such a swift reaction would have taken any warrior by surprise, but not an excellent fighter like Venor, who swerved just in time and escaped intact.

“Peter, don't do anything like that again!” I shouted at him, while the gauges were now reaching the alarm zone.

He muttered something between his teeth and threw his fist against a black piece of furniture, of indefinable material and use.

“We must get out of here!” I uttered thoughtful.

“How shall we do this, you smart aleck?”

I opened my mouth to say “I don't know” but I passed it in silence instead.

“I have an idea,” I said finally, though in obvious uncertainty. “Let's just hope it will work.”

I stood in front of the Artificial Intelligence Unit and gave an order for a space warp. My heart was pounding in my throat, hoping to have followed the correct programming procedure, hoping it wasn't too late for that as well.

To my great relief, the complicate order was eventually accepted, in spite of the enormous energy loss. Only one second of sheer agony elapsed; then I sank into a sweet vertigo, my conscience lost in a seething vortex deep inside, and the entire universe seemed to be melting in its awesome eye.

* * * * *

I am flying high over endless white fields; I enter a narrow, foggy path that gradually takes shape between two lines of leafy trees. I relish an exhilarating sense of freedom, but

soon everything around me melts into the astral substance – the ethereal matter all universes are made of. A new path is now being formed before me, barely discernible between the white tree trunks that spout up towards the alabaster sky. For a split second everything remains motionless, translucent white, incomplete. Suddenly, at the far end of the path, I can see a sphere of sparkling light that grows brighter and brighter, until it obliterates the trees, the path, me, the world...

The blinding light gradually began to take material forms; I was rather scared at first, but I felt a lot better when I realized we were still on the bridge of the *Zephyrus* and everything seemed to be in place. Yet, it was obvious we were no longer travelling; the starship seemed to be inert. I looked at the main screen impatiently and I was relieved to find out that *dimensional transposition* had been successfully completed.

The place where we had landed was magical: A green prairie crowned by distant, lilac mountains, under a fiery dawn. Sparse cottages signified the presence of intelligent, maybe human life. Strong wind was blowing over the silent land, lifting clusters of dry leaves into the air. I just couldn't believe such peace and quiet around us; I only wished I could relish it, but somehow I couldn't, as it gave me the impression of the calm that precedes the storm.

No more than a few seconds had passed, when I noticed a little sparkling light tracing a curved line on the sky, beyond the high mountain crest in the horizon. It looked like a distant shooting star, but I had no doubts about what it really was.

Without explaining anything to Peter, I retired to my chamber with the excuse of feeling tired. I lay down and let my mind be still; my heartbeat gradually decelerated and

became fainter and fainter, as I was falling in a state of deep hypnosis. When the time was right, I prompted my astral body out.

The astral projection verified my suspicions: the sparkling light was a spacecraft, no other than Venor's personal spacecraft. I watched the throne prince of the Yrkanian Empire walk out of the pilot's cockpit and call his men. All of a sudden he paused and looked around carefully. His set face with the clear-cut features looked stern, his blue eyes narrowed with suspicion. *Can he somehow sense my presence?* I wondered.

My return was abrupt and awkward, leaving me with a vague impression of an ethereal wave thrown back into my physical body, as well as the bad temper that usually follows a violently interrupted astral projection. Anyway, I was back in my chamber again, my heart pounding in anguish. I sprang to my feet, dashed to the door and froze there, as I heard rushing steps and harsh soldiers' voices echoing right outside my room. *For heaven's sake, has my trip taken so long?* I wondered full of worry. Then I leaned my back against the door and shut my eyes breathless...

* * * * *

The squad of ten Yrkanian soldiers stood motionless as they suddenly saw someone blocking the octagonal corridor before them: it was the notorious Peter of the Stars, challenging the intruders with a laser sword in hand. There was a moment of mutual hesitation; then, one of the soldiers launched an attack and the battle burst out. Peter fought them all with undaunted courage, remaining surprisingly cool during the unequal fight. His laser blade flashed deadly in the ionized air, soon exterminating three of his opponents. He seemed to enjoy the tension of every single moment, as if the result didn't really matter to him, winning or losing,

living or dying. He looked proud and fearless even when he was forced to retreat and captured in the end. His green eyes glowed with fury, while a big firearm was now pointed at his chest.

“Hold it!”

Venor's commanding voice echoed in the corridor and all the Yrkanian warriors froze at their master's order.

At that point I opened my eyes again; I was exhausted, for I knew very soon everything would be lost.

Next moment Venor was standing right outside my door and he was going to force the lock at once, unless I did something.

As I got out of my room with slow, stealthy steps, Venor looked at me flabbergasted. His long, blond hair waved over his broad shoulders, and he riveted his bright blue eyes on me. This time I showed him a red-hair Sandra Anderson, dressed in a rather provocative white uniform.

“How did you find me here, Venor?” I asked as calm as possible.

“You know my spacecraft can carry out space dilations; besides, there is no way you can hide from me, you know that too, Sandra”, he replied.

“So, what do you want this time?”

“At first I doubted whether you would ever be able to locate the *Zephyrus*, let alone steal it; but now that you have finally done it, I want it for myself. Am I clear enough?”

“I think so...”

I paused and looked at him straight into the eyes, which distracted him for a moment or two.

“As about you...” he went on hesitant.

“What about me, Venor?”

“I shall kill you at the slightest opposition!”

“I don't intend to oppose at all”, I said in a low, maybe sensual voice.

At the same time my right hand slipped to the side of my belt, where a laser gun was hidden. Before anyone could realize what was happening, I pushed the prince away from me and fired twice. That unexpected attack of mine caught the soldiers off guard and two of them collapsed on the floor lifeless.

Peter grasped at the opportunity at once; with a sharp movement of his arms he managed to free himself from those who held him captive. I shot once again but missed, as the rest of the soldiers stepped aside just in time and got ready to fight back. Peter reacted instantly, sweeping them all down with a set of fast kicks. Then we both fled at once, while Venor's raging voice was echoing behind us:

“Get them back! Now!”

I ran frantically along dark corridors, barely dodging the successive mortal beams that flashed around me; I went up and down spiral stairways, entered odd-shaped rooms I barely took a look at, the enemies' steps always a few paces behind. All of a sudden, I shivered; I had no idea where I was. My agony reached a peak as I realized Peter was nowhere to see. Moreover, I was now standing in front of a black, metal door at the edge of a narrow passageway, while the soldiers' rushing steps were echoing closer and closer behind me. I saw no other alternative but open that door and hide, wherever that would be.

Next instant, a shock: I was virtually trapped in a bizarre room full of bizarre pieces of machinery, whose utility I couldn't imagine at all. My pursuers were already by the

door, and there was no other way out. I gasped for air, almost worn out.

“Sandra Anderson! Give up!” Venor's voice reverberated into the dimly lit room.

I stood motionless, pondering on the situation; there was no point in trying to escape any more. I hid quickly behind a high translucent pillar filled with a yellow effervescent fluid. I just waited there, with all my senses on the alert.

Seconds later, the Yrkanian soldiers trooped in, with their heavy firearms in hand. Once they had approached near enough, I extended my hand and fired without thinking twice. One of them dropped dead on the black, tiled floor. Right after, I moved fast and took cover behind a lofty, metal construction on my left, barely dodging the concerted counterattack of the others.

All of a sudden, I felt a violent grasp around my waist; strong, muscular arms had seized and lifted me up, so tight that choked all the air out of my lungs. Defying the sharp pain in my ribs, I managed to throw a direct kick to another Yrkanian soldier who sought to pounce on me. Then I twisted my body rapidly and my left elbow hit my captor hard on the chin. That made him loosen his grip a little, and I landed him one on the nose with the back of my fist; he let go, screaming in pain. My feet finally touched the ground, and I was free again.

Next moment I felt a bad singe on my armed hand and I dropped the laser gun with a cry of pain. To my astonishment, I saw it was Venor who had fired. *How could I ever forget about him, even for a split second?* I wondered. His firearm was now pointed at me and I was scared stiff.

“It is all over, Sandra,” he announced firm, while his soldiers were gathering behind him, one by one, all armed

and ready to fire.

It was right at that moment that I felt the *power* energizing me – once again, just when I needed it most. I raised my left hand and launched an energy blast against the enemies, forcing them to step back astounded. However, it was clear - to them and me- that this time the *power* wasn't strong enough to neutralize them. I lifted myself high in the air, as if flying, and repeated the astral attack once more. That didn't do much to them either, but it was good enough to distract them for a couple of seconds.

I had to escape fast, for I was already running out of energy; pretty soon I would fall in their hands, completely worn out. *But, maybe, I can make it*, I tried to think positive and rushed towards the exit, only to come face to face with Venor. His laser weapon was pointed at me, and I suddenly felt so weak. Next moment he fired; I felt my whole body being wreathed in a burning flash – and nothing more.

* * * * *

I woke up in the dim light of my chamber. For an instant I hoped all the previous mishaps were just a bad dream, but no... *Is all lost then?* I feared, and my heart lost a leap.

Soon I realized Venor was all over me; I tried to move but it was impossible. My legs were fastened to the bed, my arms to the bolster. I could feel his touch all over my body, tearing my white, sheath uniform with his hands. Then, his lips were on my throat; the impatient kiss soon turned to a ferocious bite and I screamed of pain as blood came out of the wound. *What did he do that for?* I wondered, but didn't dare say anything.

Strong hands were now on my breasts, irritating the erect nipples, and I couldn't help sighing with lust. Next moment he was inside me; he took me again and again, and all I did

was ask for more, which drove him crazy. That went on and on, until I could no longer think or feel anything, for my senses had reached their utmost limits. I don't know how much time had lapsed before it was all over and I heard him call my name in a soft voice; I strove to start breathing normally again, my eyes suffused with tears.

He untied my hands and legs, and helped me sit by him in a most affectionate manner. He was fully dressed now, while I was still wearing the tattered uniform. I sought to grab him, but he stopped me with strange tenderness.

Neither of us spoke a word, but I knew I was going to keep the *Zephyrus,* let's say as a present for the incredible sexual experience we had just shared – and that was meant to be a secret.

Next moment I tried to stand up, but my legs weren't strong enough for that. I nearly collapsed in his hands and I felt like melting again, as I relished the touch of his strong arms around me once more. After a moment of mutual perplexity, he gave me a long, passionate kiss; then he got up, opened the door and disappeared in the dark.

Peter found me a few minutes later. As he approached, he looked rather bewildered and absent minded. He didn't make any comments about my appearance; he only asked if I was all right. I assured him I was, he said he was okay too.

He had been a prisoner of the Yrkanians for a while, but he managed to escape with remarkable ease, as he mentioned thoughtful. Then we talked for a while in low voices, and I had to explain to him that Venor was here, in my room.

“I don't get it”, he concluded gloomily. “This man now wants your destruction, and then wants your body...”

“He is a little bit paranoid”, I replied smiling.

Just like you and me, I thought to myself.

Story Eleven: Dark Places

originally handwritten
from 19th May to 23rd June, 1993

This time I, Emma, was dreaming of R. Hyndel, a renowned master of Buddhism who gives lectures all over the world. He is of European origin and quite handsome, despite his fifty years of age. I have attended three of his lectures (my parents have no idea, of course) and I like him a lot, as well as his teachings. *Not that I intend to become a Buddhist...*

Anyway, in my dream he and I were together in the same hotel room. He looked very attractive in his T-shirt and shorts. However, there were other people there too, some of his disciples maybe. At a moment I asked him to comb my hair; I sat on a chair and he got ready for that, but a comb was missing, so he left to fetch it.

At that point I knew I was dreaming. I still wanted to be with Hyndel, although his skin had just taken a light blue colour. I didn't give it much thought as for some strange reason that change seemed to be normal there. Nevertheless, I stood up and sought all over the place to find him. However, he was nowhere to see; the surrounding environment began to blur, I was lost in nowhere, and I had already forgotten all about him...

* * * * *

I was elsewhere now, immersed in thick, pitch black darkness. I screamed in pain as sharp, insupportable pain shook my body, again and again. It took me several seconds

to put my mind together and remember that I, Sandra Anderson, had been captured by my worst enemy, Venor of Yrkania. He had tied my arms up in chains and he was torturing me with a lash. I had no idea why he was doing that, there was no specific reason.

Time seemed to be still, until my flimsy, purple, strapless blouse was reduced to pieces. He let go the lash, he came near and cupped my breasts. Next moment, his right hand was on the belt of my trousers, and there was no more doubt about what my being flogged meant.

However, all that was just a dream of mine, I knew this at last and there was no more pain. As about the rest, well, I wasn't in the mood any more. I turned my head the other way, shut my eyes and wished I were somewhere else instead.

In an instant everything was gone; I felt as if I were sinking in void, then nothingness...

* * * * *

Suddenly, I heard a familiar voice echo in the dark of the night: “Be careful! Lord Kochon has located us!” Peter of the Stars shouted at his warriors, as the vagabond's starship appeared ominous above them.

Next moment a thick laser blast was launched against Peter, who managed to dodge it with a high jump. There were more laser beams all over the craggy cliffs of the Nameless Lagoon, while Peter and his men were running frantically to take cover.

“You, loser! You missed again!” Peter shouted to the starship.

He he was standing on a cliff, waving his hands, hoping to catch the enemy's attention and save his warriors' lives. Once again I admired his courage and determination, but

this time I could see it would be actually impossible for him to escape.

There was no more time to lose; I had to distract Lord Kochon somehow, before it was too late for Peter and the others. Thank Goddess, I was just feeling enough *power* inside me so as to materialize at the correct place and take the correct action.

All at once, Kochon and his five-member crew stood still as they saw the vacuum cleaner get away from the deck-hand and attack them as if it had just come alive! They forgot about Peter and the lasers immediately, and looked at him aghast. As I got rid of the deck-hand clothes and revealed my true identity, they all took one step back in wonder. I smiled, finding that really amusing.

“You... you are not my deck-hand! You are Sandra Anderson!” stammered Lord Kochon, trembling of anger and surprise.

“This is not a vacuum cleaner! It's a monster from outer space!” I joked awkwardly.

At that moment I noticed one of Kochon's men was about to pull out his laser gun. I jumped up at once and performed a swift air somersault, finally landing on his chin. Another flying kick of mine neutralized one more enemy, leaving the rest of them flabbergasted.

“Leave now or I will come for you again!” I promised Lord Kochon, as I was spirited away before his stupefied eyes.

“I hope not!” he uttered short of breath.

* * * * *

Peter was certainly relieved after his narrow escape from Lord Kochon, yet I could tell from the look in his eyes there was something else still bothering him. I am not used to

seeing him like this, and I don't like it when it happens because it always means very serious trouble. He was rather reluctant to talk about it, but I finally convinced him to confide in me.

“There is a small, beautiful planet not very far from Eldyla, inhabited by various kinds of intelligent beings, entities of other evolution spirals. The planet is called Azuria and orbits the star Aldebaran...”

“I can't go Aldebaran”, I hastened to say.

“Why not?”

“I've been sentenced to death on twelve planets there!”

“You are kidding!” said Peter in astonishment. “How, why?”

“I would rather not discuss it, okay?”

“Alright... but listen: According to recent information, things are no longer the same in Azuria. After the latest developments, nobody will be interested in you there”, he went on with an air of mystery.

“What kind of developments?” I became curious.

“The revolutionary Jessie has spread the revolution against the Elvish Dominion all over Azuria...”

“The revolutionary Jessie?” I exclaimed surprised.

“Yeah, he is quite famous; he is considered to be the last genuine Azurian survivor after the Sacred Wars. You know a lot about him, don’t you?” asked Peter suspiciously.

“In fact, I do”, I replied in a soft voice, painful memories rushing into my mind. “So, what's the problem exactly?”

“I don't know exactly; but Jessie's motives seem to be no longer so pure, as he is suspected to pursue global power for himself. He is also said to have allied the Nether Elves lately, creatures who live in the underground caverns of

Azuria and are notorious for their predatory nature and loose scruples. Anyway, the whole planet is in tumult, and other planets have already been affected as well!"

"Therefore, you are probably worried about Eldyla too", I uttered spontaneously, and regretted my saying so at once.

Peter just gave me a serious look.

"So, I guess we are leaving for Azuria", I said then, and Peter nodded smiling.

* * * * *

After a short but fruitful investigation, having barely escaped serious trouble with Azurian and other rebels, Peter and I were now making our way through the thick forest of Laicung, named after the ancient city that flourished here thousands of years ago.

The sun was setting when we finally discovered the ruins of the city in a big clearing. The sacred temple of now unknown deities emerged almost intact in the crimson twilight. It looked quite impressive, with its green and purple marble walls partly covered by winding tree branches. The main entrance was crowned by four high pillars curved in the shape of charming goddesses, who seemed to be watching us with their golden eyes in the evening mist.

We passed the threshold with extra caution. The air seemed to be getting more and more ionized with every step we took inside the temple. I could sense a jumble of malignant, ancient forces lurking in there, with an undying desire to be active in the world again. We had proceeded into the inner rooms, when I paused breathless; I could suddenly feel we were no longer alone in that dark place. I could perceive a presence -no, presences- all around us, watching every movement of ours. My heart leaped in my chest and I

shivered of anxiety.

Next instant, bright torch lights flooded the dusky temple, blinding us for some seconds. When our eyesight cleared out, we could see we were surrounded by an indefinite number of elf warriors, who seemed to have sprouted out of nowhere. They were all dressed in smart, green outfits and armed with fire guns.

“Who are you two and what are you doing here?” one of them, probably their chief, demanded to know.

“Listen, we are not your enemies...” replied Peter as calm as possible.

“We shall see about that!” snapped the "chief". “Now, come with us and don't try anything stupid!”

“Keep moving!” ordered another one, urging us to do so with the barrel of his fire gun.

There was something in their cunning faces and crooked smiles that I didn't like at all; therefore, I decided to act fast, first by distracting their attention: I stepped aside to a corner and began to moan all over, astounding everybody -Peter included- with my girly faint-heartedness.

“Please, please, don't hurt us! Please, let us go!” I cried and cried, while everyone was watching dumbfounded for some moments of embarrassment.

One of the elf warriors approached me from behind, with the intention of pushing me forward. I hit him hard on the solar plexus with my elbow, then landed him one on the face. He was caught by surprise and knocked down at once. Peter jumped at the chance to neutralize some of the enemies with a set of impressive high kicks. All this bought us a couple of seconds – time enough for us to escape into a nearby tunnel.

We ran and ran along the winding, underground passage, soldiers' footsteps constantly echoing behind us, bullets flying around our heads. At a certain moment I took a left turn so as to avoid some more bullets, hoping also to lose the enemies; just then I realized Peter was nowhere to see. Moreover, I could still hear the elves coming closer and closer; it would be a matter of seconds for them to get me. I kept on running along a narrow gallery, desperately seeking a way out of there, and then I saw it: A dark, oblong gap among the rocks, barely discernible, probably leading deeper into the bowels of the planet. That could prove to be even more dangerous than confronting the elf soldiers, but I took a deep breath and jumped in...

* * * * *

Thank Goddess, I was pretty lucky this time; after an indefinite span of time, always running, I finally found myself in a place where my pursuers would never dare approach.

I stood behind a latticed, glass doorway for a few moments, and admired the wonderful bathroom behind it. Unless I had seen it with my own eyes, I would have never believed there could be such luxury on that planet. The walls were covered by rosy, shiny tiles. The floor consisted of diamond-shaped, lilac slabs. There was an impressive, artificial waterfall rising over the oval bath-tub. Behind it there was a sort of hidden device that emitted vibrating rays of light in the form of an enchanting rainbow. My heart lost a leap as I realized who was taking a shower in there.

I just stayed motionless for a while, observing the sparkling streams of water running down his wonderful body. As if mesmerized, I could no longer think, nor could I control my mad desire...

I waited patiently until he finished; then I blew the latticed

door away with my laser gun and stepped into the bathroom.

“Freeze, Jessie!” I shouted, aiming at him.

He stood still, perfectly calm; he didn't even turn round to face me. He just looked terrific, even from behind, and *I would so much like to...*

“Fancy that! The good, old Sandra Anderson!” he only uttered.

“At last I've found you, Jessie!” I said, hardly believing I was seeing him after all those years.

“I have been waiting for you, all this time, you know”, he announced softly.

“It's time we settled some accounts, old and new ones”, I retorted.

“Why are you here, Sandra?” he asked then.

“I would like you to answer some questions”, I answered bluntly. “First of all, what's your relation with the Nether Elves?”

“That's my business, Sandra; and I don't have to answer any of your questions! Especially after last time!” he exclaimed and his chest sank in obvious commotion.

Right at that moment my heart sank too, as I thought he was still the same, fascinating man I had known many years ago. His blue, Azurian complexion was studded with water drops that shimmered like diamonds in the soft light. His straight, blond hair crowned a charming face that beamed with the self-confidence of someone who controls the fate of a planet.

“You and I are going out of here together, right now Jessie!” I demanded.

He laughed as if he had just heard something very funny.

“You think it is so simple, Sandra?” he mocked.

Well, it wouldn't be that simple, especially in that condition he was...

“Shoot now, Sandra! You won't have another chance!” he said then in a strange, gloomy voice that made me shiver.

He just waited motionless for several moments of tense silence. Then he turned round, exposing his nude, sensual, perfect body to me. His obsidian eyes were glowing charmingly in the hazy light of the bathroom.

“There is only one thing you really want from me, Sandra!” he said finally – *and he was absolutely right...*

Then he began walking towards me and I froze. His shiny, blue skin drove me crazy; I lost control and ran to him impatiently. For an instant of bliss his arms embraced me with sincere affection.

Next moment I was hurled down, slipping all the way across the purple slabs of the floor, while he was running away laughing. Before I knew it, he had already escaped into an arched corridor, shutting the door behind him. I just sat up and cried of frustration, feeling so helplessly hollow inside…

I can't tell how much time lapsed until I could put myself together again, but just then there was a strong bump on my head and I lost my senses.

* * * * *

Tloa was a Nether Elf, in fact their queen, and she was the first thing I saw as soon as I recovered. The next creature I saw was Kaleyh, a very young elf who soon proved to be Tloa's brother. He followed her everywhere, like an obedient dog, and did whatever she told him without delay.

I was disappointed to find out Peter was beside me. He and I

were prisoners of the Nether Elfs; they kept us in a small, uncomfortable cell made of thin yet unbreakable stone bars. We were somewhere underground, in a wild but fascinating cave studded with odd-shaped rocks, natural arches and curved bridges rising over sparkling brooks and pools; the whole place was beautifully lighted by white, luminous crystals embedded in the walls.

There were lots of dark-skinned elves all around, coming and going, chatting and laughing, all of them beaming with outlandish charm. I guessed this should be their only virtue, as they kept riveting their malevolent, yellow eyes at us, smiling cunningly, as if they were just engineering a secret plot against us.

Suddenly there was buzz and hum among the elves, a cheerful agitation all over the place, as somebody very important appeared through one of the numerous galleries. It was Jessie. He approached our cell with slow steps, beaming with satisfaction in his tight, silver-coloured uniform with the black belt.

“So, Sandra”, he said, “Now you've met my people”.

Next moment he put his arms around Tloa's slender shoulders and I went nuts.

“You see, Sandra”, he went on, “the Nether Elves have finally accepted me as their king next to their and my beloved queen, Tloa”, he explained with a triumphant mien.

“Are you sure you can trust them?” I sought to make him wonder, but he just chuckled disdainfully.

“Thanks to our alliance, I am now the absolute ruler of this planet”, he replied. “The race of Azurians perished long ago, but I am still here, alive and king of the planet!”

“I didn't expect you to be so power thirsty, Jessie”, I said then, deeply disappointed. *That was no longer the man I*

once knew...

“Now, as about if I can trust these people... yes, I can! They are loyal, they are bold, they are ruthless and they have useful talents, treating spies for example!” he concluded in a harsh, foreign voice that made me shudder.

At that point Jessie turned and kissed Tloa in a most ostentatious manner.

“Did you really think you could ever have me, Sandra?” he told me then, full of irony.

“You, bastard!” I shouted, hitting the bars of my cell angrily.

Jessie laughed; then he turned round and walked out of the cave, looking very proud and sure of himself.

After some moments of despair and sorrow, I reckoned our only salvation would be a surge of *power*. Yet I knew it wasn't going to come to me, while time was passing inexorable; the Nether Elves were still looking at us with fierce eyes, already plotting unspeakable ways of torturing and killing us.

I took some deep breaths and thought carefully: There was one way I could force the *power* to come inside me, but it was of dubious effectiveness and rather extreme. *Nevertheless, it could work*, I concluded full of hope.

All I needed was a handsome man – and I had one right by my side. I turned and looked at Peter sitting there taciturn, and I found him more attractive than ever. I got near him hesitantly, and I touched his chest gently; he looked at me with wondering eyes. We didn't exchange any words, but he already knew what I wanted from him and why. He lay down in a most sensual manner, and I was on him immediately, my hands all over his perfect body.

Soon we were both naked, and I had him inside me, again

and again, for Goddess knows how much wonderful time. In the meanwhile both of us had forgotten all about the Nether Elves, who were watching flabbergasted. At first I controlled my impetus, then I got more impatient and demanding, and he was always ready to satisfy me to the fullest. The elves kept on watching us, all dumbfounded and speechless, unable to believe their eyes, but I didn't care about that, or maybe I liked that too...

Peter just gave in to that unprecedented sexual experience without reservations, although it was obvious it was gradually exhausting him. At a certain moment I moved back and, for a couple of seconds, I admired his masculine beauty. I suddenly felt very affectionate towards him and gently caressed his broad chest. I had been absorbing vital energy from him during all that time, and he had been more than willing to offer it to me, no matter the consequences: He was all worn out now, unable to move a finger, but pleased as never before.

Right then I could feel it – the *power*, stronger than I had ever experienced it, surging inside every cell of my body. I raised my hands and struck the whole place with a terrible blast of energy, which swept away our cell and all the elves around us. Pretty soon they were all lying on the ground motionless, some of them unconscious, some of them dead, I didn't know and I didn't care.

Next moment I touched Peter's shoulder, energizing him enough so that he could stand up and run with me, as far away from that place as possible.

* * * * *

We fled through the dark rocks of the underground cavity, then we entered other rooms and endless galleries that seemed to be leading nowhere, desperately looking for an exit to the surface.

Very soon there were elves' frantic steps and voices behind us, shooting at us with fire guns. We ran and ran, until we finally discovered an exit to a seaside lavishly lit by an gigantic, orange-coloured, rising sun. We hastened towards it in anguish, while the elves were getting nearer and nearer; it would be a matter of time until we got caught.

No sooner had we rushed out of the gallery to the beautiful, sandy beach, than I perceived some violent motion right in front of me; a strong elbow hit my head bad, making me lose balance and fall down. As I sat up right after, I saw Jessie standing over me, while the elves had just reached us and captivated Peter. Once again, everything seemed to be lost...

“You thought you could get away with this, Sandra?” Jessie asked with a wicked smile.

“Let us punish them our way, my king!” cried Tloa complacently.

“Just tell us how, my queen and sister”, chipped in Kaleyh, with fiery eyes.

There are certain points in time and space where miracles happen, and I suppose that was one of them: Within a split second, Peter caught Tloa by surprise, grabbed her gun, captured her in his arms and pressed the barrel on her right temple.

“You all drop your guns and let us go, or your queen dies!” he cried full of determination, while she had frozen in despair.

Everybody froze; nobody stirred, nor uttered a word. Just then I felt there was still some *power* inside me, enough to produce another energy blast which neutralized all enemies; all but Jessie, who ducked immediately, thus avoiding being hit. Then it all happened too quickly: Jessie stood on his

right knee and pulled out his fire gun, with the intention of shooting me down at once. Right at that moment, Peter fired.

I watched Jessie's body shake for one long moment, before he collapsed. It took me several seconds to focus on what had just happened: The revolutionary Jessie was lying down before me, completely motionless, with an enormous wound on his chest. His blood was red and it overflowed his blue skin under the torn, silver-coloured fabric of his uniform.

“I had no alternative”, I heard Peter say breathless, but I paid no heed.

I couldn't help bursting into tears, as I was bent over Jessie's lifeless body. An insupportable wave of sorrow overtook me, as I couldn't really believe that Jessie, the last genuine Azurian, was no longer alive. More and more tears came down my cheeks, as I had him in my arms, only for one and last time – and it was my fault somehow. Once he was a legend and a secret passion for me; then he became a promising ally; in the end, he eventually proved to a dangerous but most desirable opponent. Never had I had the chance to love him, and now he was dead. I cried on and on, feeling terribly sad and guilty...

Suddenly everything around me blurred; I could only feel a dark whirlwind absorbing my conscience deeper and deeper into an infinite, spectral tunnel, carrying me away, very far away from the cursed Azuria and its endless grief.

* * * * *

I, Emma, woke up with a start. I accidentally fumbled on a fantasy comic book I had been reading before going to sleep last night. I opened it at a random page inadvertently, and took an abstracted look on the colourful picture: It showed the King of the Blue Elves fighting the vampire Targov

outside an iron gate by a steep precipice. Both men were armed with shiny swords.

“I knew that if I lured you away from Elvenland and deprive you of your magic powers, I could beat you once and for all!” announced Targov with a darkened face.

“Don't be so sure about it!” retorted the King of the Blue Elves.

I stared at the picture and its captions for some seconds, like hypnotized; then I left the book aside, took a deep breath and stood up, ready to start a new day.

Synchronicities

(Points of Contact between Dimensions)

First phase synchronicities are the ones I experienced in the years 1992-1993, while writing the first volume of the original illustrated manuscripts titled "Memories of Sandra Anderson".

Second phase synchronicities are those I experienced from February to April 2021, while typing and editing the respective digital version of this volume on my computer, with the intention to uploading it on digital libraries.

Third phase synchronicities are the ones I experienced while editing the digital version for a second time, in October 2022. This time all pictures were omitted and the book was uploaded on publishing platforms.

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Story 2, pages 21-22 (second phase): On 18th Feb., 2021, I type about Sandra and Peter reaching a picturesque lake because they expect to find something there; the shore is stony and there are swans in the water. *A few hours later, I watch a detective film on TV. In a scene there is a picturesque lake with a stony shore and swans in the water. Two detectives, a man and a woman, go there because they expect to find something...*
It is the first time after 22 years that I experience a *contact* and it feels great... ♥

Story 3, pages 30, 31, 34 (third phase): On 11th Oct., 2022, I edit the text where Sandra meets a girl named Rose in a
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forest. Later, in her hiding place, Sandra finds a poster of an actress who looks like Monroe: she has short, blond hair and a wide smile on her sensual face, and she is wearing a flimsy, white dress. At the end of my story, Emma gets a porcelain doll of Monroe as a present from her cousin. *Three days ago a friend of mine brought me two cushions as a present. One of them shows two roses; the word "Rose" is written on it with big letters. The other one shows a portrait of Monroe with short, blond hair and a wide smile on her sensual face; she is wearing a flimsy, white dress.*

Story 5, page 45 (first phase): *Two days after I had started writing this story, there was a thriller on TV which unfolded on a ship called Regina.*

Story 5, pages 46-47 (second phase): On 7th March, 2021, I type about Sandra entering a casino; she is wearing good clothes and she has false identity. Later, Sandra escapes from the casino by throwing a frying pan at two policemen. *Next day I watch a detective film on TV. The well-dressed protagonist enters a club with a false identity. Later, two policemen go to an old man's house but he chases them away by throwing frying pans at them.*

Story 5, pages 48-49 (third phase): On 14th October, 2022, I edit the text where Peter (young and red-haired) is fighting against Alexander (older and black-haired) on a "friendly" duel with laser swords. *Two days later, I happen to watch a TV show for two minutes; there is a presentation of a manufacturer who makes laser swords for the cinema industry. There is shown a "friendly" duel with laser swords; one of the fighters is young and red-haired, while the other one is older and black-haired.*

Story 5, page 56 (first phase): On 14th October, 1992, I write that Venor ends up as a prisoner, but he escapes in a

laundry-spacecraft. *At night I watch an adventure film on TV; the protagonist is a prisoner but he escapes in a laundry-cart.*

Story 6 (second phase): On 20th March, 2021, early in the morning, I edit the whole story. Special details:

a] The male protagonist is called Trevor.

b] Sandra Anderson is blond here, and she wears casual clothes (p. 59).

c] The third protagonist is Peter of the Stars, who looks like an adolescent.

d] Trevor and Sandra reach another world through a dimensional vortex created by Peter (p. 63).

e] Suddenly, they are in a magical landscape: an evening sky over a green forest mysteriously illuminated by a bright rainbow; a fascinating waterfall comes down a black mountain in the background; there is also a beautiful lake with topaz waters (p. 64).

f] While there, Trevor gets into a cave, in search of a precious gem. Sandra and Peter find him there (pp. 65-66).

g] In the end Sandra ties Trevor in bed and saves him from certain death (pp. 68-69).

h] There are no other protagonists in this story; only a few persons appear in the beginning and in the end, playing very small parts.

i] The man who inspired Emma to create this astral adventure is a teacher called Mark (pp. 58, 69).

At night there is a fantasy film on TV. Special details respectively:

a) The protagonist is called Trevor.

b) The female protagonist has long, blond hair and wears casual clothes.

c) The third protagonist is an adolescent.

d) The three protagonists reach another world after falling through an endless, vertical tunnel.

e) They find themselves in a cave full of precious gems.

f) Suddenly, they are in a magical landscape: an evening sky over a green forest, mysteriously illuminated by a bright rainbow; a fascinating waterfall comes down a dark mountain in the background; there is a beautiful lake with topaz waters.

g) At a time, the leading actress ties Trevor with a rope and saves him from certain death.

h) Actually, there are no other protagonists; only a few persons appear in the beginning and in the end, playing very small parts.

i) One of the three script-writers is called Mark.

Story 7, page 71 (first phase): On 30th November, 1992, in the afternoon, I write about Emma meeting George Dim in the bus; she feels very happy because she is attracted to him. He approaches her and they start talking; he asks her where she lives and so on. *A few hours later, I meet an old schoolmate of mine by chance, right outside my house. Her name is Thelxi (the name means "attraction"). She gets off her car, she approaches, she asks me where I live and I show her my house; then, and we talk happily for a while.*

Story 7, page 73 (first phase): On 1st December, 1992, in the afternoon, I write about a spectral skeleton being formed over a cemetery. *Next morning I learn that my uncle George suddenly died at night.*

Story 7, page 74 (second phase): On 26th March, 2021, early in the morning, I type on the computer about Venor walking towards Sandra through a door, but he shuns talking to her; Venor is Sandra's archenemy, he has caused her lots of trouble, but sometimes they are on friendly terms and she likes him somehow. *In the evening I go for a walk; I happen to see July coming out of a door towards me, but she shuns talking to me. July is my archenemy, she has caused me lots of serious trouble in the past, but we were good friends once and I like her somehow...*

Story 8, page 84 (first phase): On 11th January, 1993, in the afternoon, I write about Sandra singing and dancing in a night pub. *The following evening I go to a cousin's birthday party; late at night we all decide to go to a dancing club.*

Story 8, page 87 (first phase): On 17th January, 1993, in the afternoon, I write about Sandra having terrible headaches. *Next day I have a strong stomachache all day long*

Story 8, page 87 (second phase): On 7th April, 2021, in the morning, I type on the computer that Sandra doesn't feel well at all and she has terrible headaches. *In the afternoon my friend Thalia comes and says she doesn't feel well at all and she has terrible pains all over her body, especially her stomach.*

Story 8, page 88 (first phase): On 21st January, 1993, in the afternoon, I write about Sandra meditating in bed and falling into trance that could lead her to death. *Early next morning I meditate in bed and I have an experience that feels like falling into deep void.*

Story 8, page 89 (second phase): On 8th April, 2021, early in the morning, I type on the computer that Sandra has a spiritual communication with Peter of the Stars, her eternal

love who dwells in another dimension; two other persons are in her room, watching her. *At about noon, my mother asks me to fetch her the radio, so that she can listen to some music (in two days she is turning 87, going to 88, and it's the first time she has ever asked to listen to the radio). At that moment my sister comes in. I tune the radio for my mother, and as I find the station 88.0, we all hear the first verses of a Greek folk song we have never heard before. This is the meaning of the lyrics: "With a 22 blue, I pierce the net of time ... love eternal". All three of us are taken aback at the coincidence: 22 blue was the brand of cigarettes my father used to smoke when he was alive...*

Story 9, page 96 (second phase): On 18th April, 2021, early in the morning, I type the first paragraph of the story, which says that Emma gets a visit from her cousin Ann-Marie and her mother. *At night I dream of visiting my cousin Ann-Marie and her mother.*

Story 10, pages 110-113 (first phase): On 25th March, 1993, in the afternoon, I write about Sandra and Zygor fighting as gladiators in the arena. *At night I find out there is an adventure film on TV where gladiators fight in the arena.*

Story 10, pages 119-120 (first phase): On 11th April, 1993, in the afternoon, I write about the *Lethe*, which absorbs energy from Sandra's starship; Sandra gets away by making her spaceship carry out a space warp. *Later on, I watch a sci-fi cartoon on TV, where there is a device which absorbs energy from a spacecraft; it gets away by carrying out a space warp.*

Story 10, page 123 (first phase): On 13th April, 1993, in the afternoon, I write about Sandra asking "How did you find

me here, Venor?" - after she and Peter have been discovered by their pursuers. *At night, in an adventure film on TV, a similar phrase is heard by one of the two persons who are being pursued: "I don't know how they found us, but they found us!"*

Story 10, page 126 (first phase): On 18th April, 1993, in the evening, I write about Sandra who escapes from some soldiers by launching a blast of energy at them; they step back, she tries to run away. *At night there is a fantasy film on TV, where a prisoner escapes from some guards by firing at them with an anesthetic laser gun; they fall back, he runs away.*

Story 10, pages 126-127 (first phase): On 19th April, 1993, at noon, I write about Venor having Sandra under him; then he helps her stand up, and she falls into his arms. *In the evening I watch a cartoon where a young woman named Aprilia is trapped under a rafter; a handsome man helps her stand up, and she falls into his arms.*

Story 10 (third phase): On 20th October, 2022, in the morning, I edit the whole story. In the afternoon I read ten pages of a historical novel my sister lent me a fortnight ago, and I notice the following details:

a] A famous magician gets an airplane of his own.

b] An airplane is considered to be something extraordinary back at those times.

c] It is his first flight as a pilot, and it proves to be an unprecedented, exciting experience for him.

d] There is one more person in the plane, who helps the magician pilot it.

e] For some moments he thinks he is dreaming.

f] At a time he flies over a line of trees.

g] He took off at dawn, under a red sky, and flew above the countryside.

h] Later on, he is being watched by some officers of the Imperial Army.

i] The throne prince of the Austro-Hungarian Empire is also watching, and shows a special interest in the magician and his airplane.

j] One of the protagonists in the novel is called Emma.

Here are the respective incidents in Sandra's tenth adventure:

a) Sandra gets a starship of her own (p. 117).

b) This starship is considered to be extraordinary (p. 117).

c) It is her first flight as a pilot in such a starship; it proves to be an unprecedented, exciting experience for her (p. 118).

d) There is one more person in the starship, Peter of the Stars, who helps Sandra pilot it (pp. 117-120).

e) For some moments Sandra is lucid dreaming (pp.120-121).

f) At a time she dreams of flying over two lines of leafy trees (p. 120).

g) The starship lands on countryside, under a fiery dawn (p. 121).

h) Sandra's starship is being watched and followed by a spacecraft of the Yrkanian Empire, full of warriors (p. 122).

i) She is actually watched and followed by the throne prince of Yrkania, who shows a special interest in her and her starship (p. 122+).

j) One of the protagonists in my series is called Emma.

Story 10, page 128 (third phase): In the afternoon I have an appointment with a gynecologist. I expect a woman, but it proves to be man. *Later in the evening, I happen to edit the part where Sandra gets "raped" by Venor* (p. 126).

Story 11, page 129 (first phase): On 21st May, 1993, early in the morning, I write about Venor giving Sandra the lash. She is wearing a strapless blouse and tight trousers. *In the afternoon I go out with a friend of mine. She happens to be wearing similar clothes as Sandra (a strapless blouse and tight trousers). At a moment, she talks about using a lash and moves her hands accordingly. When we reach our destination, that is a funfair, we come face to face with a very handsome man with long blond hair, who looks a lot like Venor.*

Story 11, page 132 (first phase): On 24th May, 1993, in the afternoon, I write about Sandra and Peter looking for an enemy called Jessie, in an ancient temple in the forest. *In the evening there is an adventure film on TV, where the two protagonists' enemy is called Jessie. At a moment, the heroes find an ancient temple in a forest.*

Story 11 (second phase): It is the 25th April, 2021, and tomorrow I intend to start typing this story on the computer: Sandra and Peter face a new enemy, who is a rebel with a blue complexion; in the end he dies. *At night there is a sci-fi film of TV; the main protagonist is called Peter. Another protagonist is a rebel with a blue complexion; in the end he dies.*

Story 11 (second phase): On 26th April, 2021, late at night, there is a fantasy film on TV. All the protagonists belong to a blue-skinned race. One of the actors is called Azaria. *My story takes place on planet Azuria and the blue-skinned Jessie is the last genuine Azurian survivor.*